

Chapter Four

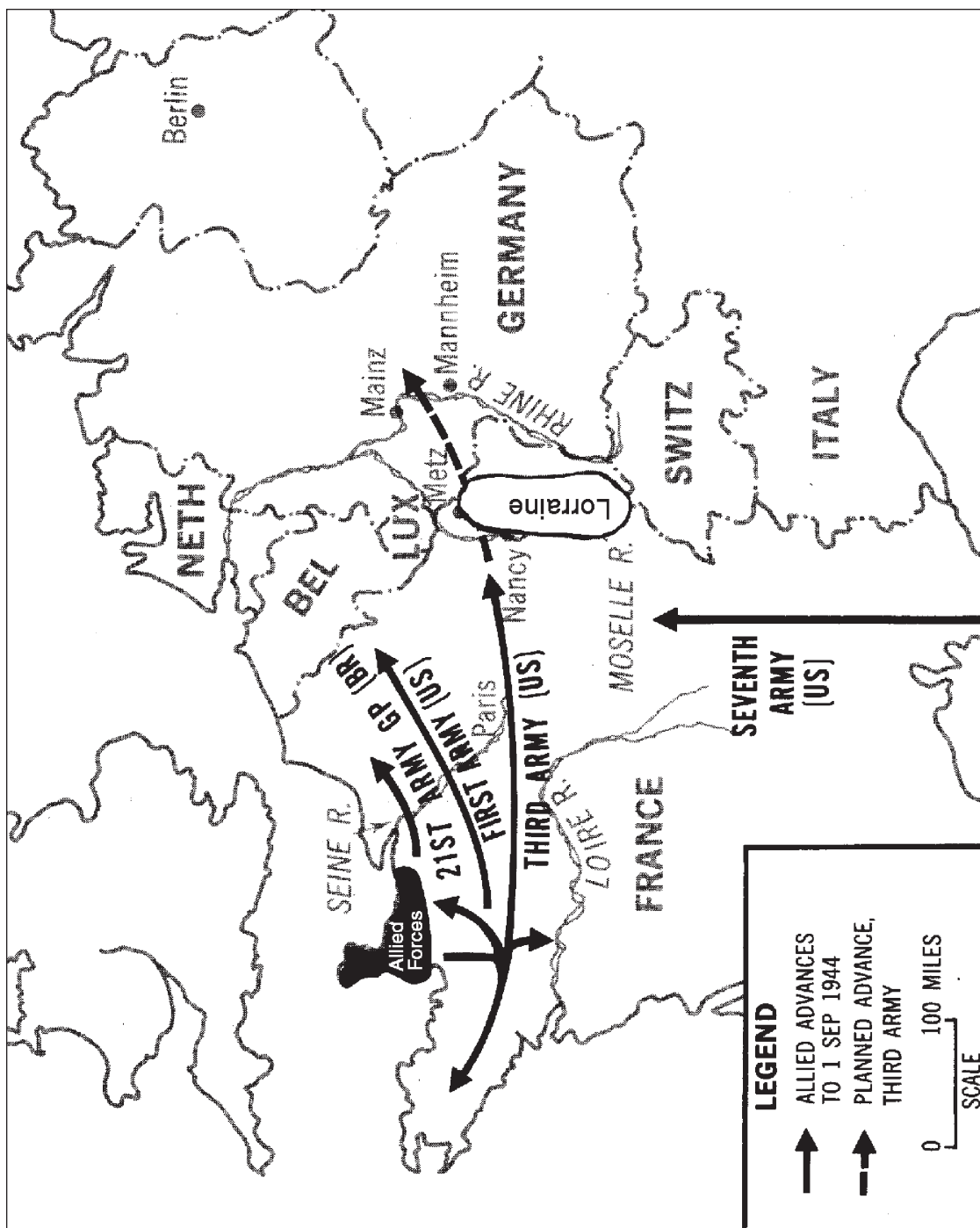
Stalemate in Lorraine

Of all U.S. Third Army's World War II campaigns, Lorraine would prove by far the most difficult and frustrating. In early September 1944, however, victory fever remained high and both officers and troops believed that Lorraine would fall quickly in General Patton's drive to the Rhine River. By month's end, numerous obstacles conspired to thwart the best efforts of Third Army and the XIX TAC; the air-ground team found itself embroiled in fighting similar to the positional warfare of World War I on the western front.¹

Autumn's Changed Conditions

In the fall of 1944, Patton's route for invading Germany south of the Ardennes increasingly claimed less Allied attention. With few key military objectives, it hardly compared with British General Montgomery's northern approach through the Ruhr industrial area, and in the context of General Eisenhower's broad-front strategy (**Map 8**), Allied leaders viewed Lorraine as a secondary front. Natural terrain and man-made defenses favored the *Wehrmacht*, and because the land rises from west to east, the Third Army would have to fight uphill throughout much of the region, cross many rivers and small streams, overrun numerous fortified towns, *and* breach two major defensive systems, the Maginot and Siegfried Lines.²

Among the German defensive systems, the Maginot Line would prove somewhat less troublesome. The French sited and built it looking eastward. The Siegfried Line, or West Wall, however, looked westward and remained a formidable challenge for the invaders. Despite recent neglect, the fortifications extended three miles deep in places and included numerous interconnected concrete pillboxes, troop shelters, observation posts, and antitank obstacles. Moreover, American troops in Lorraine dealt not only with reduced supplies of ammunition and gasoline, but also with increasingly determined German defenders able to take advantage of fortified positions and foul weather in the fall. As if these were not enough challenges, General Bradley's 12th Army Group, committed to the "northern approach," ordered Patton on September 10, 1944, to overrun the province of Lorraine and penetrate the Siegfried Line with an army reduced from four corps to two, the XXth commanded by Lt. Gen. Walton H. Walker, and the XIIth led by Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy. The



Map 8
European Theater

Reprinted from: Christopher R. Gabel, "The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, Sep-Dec 1944," (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), p. 2.

Stalemate in Lorraine

October combat quickly became a stalemate, with Third Army ground forces fighting limited engagements to improve their positions while building the supply base for a major offensive in early November that, they hoped, would take them through the Siegfried Line and on to the Rhine River.³

The Lorraine Campaign encouraged XIX TAC officials to consider the capabilities, and especially the limitations, of tactical air power. Above all, the airmen in Lorraine sought to use air power to break the stalemate on land. Weyland, as commander of the XIX TAC, became the key figure in the planning of air support in three joint operations undertaken by the Third Army against German border defenses during this period: first, Operation Madison, the assault on Metz and the Mosel defenses in early November; second, Operation Hi-Sug, the first major attempt to break through the Siegfried Line in early December; and finally, Operation Tink, the most ambitious air and ground operation of its kind, which the Allies planned to begin at the very time the Germans launched their Ardennes counteroffensive known as the Battle of the Bulge. Throughout the nearly three-month period in Lorraine, General Weyland proved to be a resourceful and pragmatic commander, one intent on providing maximum support for the ground forces. In that effort, doctrinal pronouncements did not dictate field operations. Air superiority, interdiction, and close air support received the attention he thought they deserved, but not necessarily in that order. If the way in which Weyland mixed the mission priorities during the campaign largely satisfied the needs of the ground commanders whom he supported, it frequently did not meet the expectations of tactical air purists.

Like Third Army, XIX TAC faced a radical readjustment of operations in the fall conflict. With army elements drawn abreast in September on a 135-mile front along the old French fortress line from Thionville to Epinal, mostly static action on a single front replaced the mobile operations of summer (**Map 9**). The new combat conditions were not entirely unfavorable. The long, good-weather flying days might be gone, but static warfare meant an end to decentralized operations that compelled Weyland to support multiple fronts far from home bases. As mobile as tactical air power could be, he had learned through experience that the air arm could not keep pace with General Patton's breakneck advance across France when communications links unravelled. Now the command consolidated its forces, which enabled communications, maintenance, and supply echelons to catch up near the Marne River region in close proximity to Third Army. Air bases could be clustered within 50 miles of Third Army's front lines, which reduced flying time to the target area by 50 percent. With the ground forces able to bring their medium and heavy artillery into position, the airmen could leave a large portion of the close support mission to army gunners and thus devote more of their effort to isolating the battlefield in a concerted Allied program of air interdiction.⁴

By late September 1944, the *Luftwaffe* had become especially ineffective in Third Army's zone of responsibility. During the month, the Allied onslaught

forced *Luftwaffe* leaders to give up air bases first in France and then in Belgium and to withdraw their remaining forces into Germany. The dislocation produced by Allied attacks, the loss of unified command and control, poor servicing facilities, and fuel shortages at the new bases in Germany meant that serious operations would have to await a rebuilding of the force. Moreover, at month's end, Hitler redirected the air force's primary focus to the overhead defense of the Third Reich against Allied strategic bombardment, rather than to support the *Wehrmacht* on the ground in the west. As a result, only 350 single-engine fighters covered the approaches to the Rhine, while the remaining western front command's 500 fighters moved to bases in northeast Germany to help defend Berlin and the oil industry. By transferring aircraft from the eastern front as well, the aerial force defending the Reich numbered 1,260 single-engine fighters, or nearly 65 percent of the total available single-engine fighter force.⁵

As the weather worsened with the onset of winter, XIX TAC's sortie figures plummeted from a high of 12,292 in August to 7,791 in September 1944, then skidded to 4,790 in October and only 3,509 in November. Third Army's slowdown in September and the worsening weather also permitted the Germans to build up their defenses. For XIX TAC pilots this resulted in the worst flak concentrations they had experienced thus far in the conflict.⁶

Like Patton's Third Army, Weyland's command also fought the Lorraine Campaign with reduced forces. On September 23, 1944, when General Bradley directed Third Army to assume a "defensive attitude,"⁷ Weyland still possessed all eight fighter-bomber groups comprising 288 aircraft, as well as having the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group from the summer campaign in place in eastern France. By October 1, however, XIX TAC strength had declined to five groups and 180 fighters: the Pioneer Mustang 354th Fighter Group and four Thunderbolt units. The latter included the 358th Orange Tails, the 362d Maulers, the 405th Raiders (perhaps the command's premier close support group), and the celebrated 406th Tiger Tamers. In early November, the command also lost the 358th Fighter Group to XII TAC, which supported General Patch's U.S. Seventh Army on Patton's right flank in the Alsace area of France. The only addition made to the command prior to the Ardennes emergency of mid-December was the 425th Black Widow (P-61) night fighter squadron that was assigned on October 7.⁸

During the Lorraine Campaign, General Weyland directed air operations from Etain, where XIX TAC advance headquarters moved on September 22, 1944. Administrative and support responsibilities continued to be exercised through rear headquarters located at Chalons under his chief of staff, Colonel Browne. The rear headquarters remained at Chalons throughout the fall and early winter, but advance headquarters followed Patton to Nancy on October 12, where it remained until January 1945 (**Map 9**). The most significant change in the fall came not in command organization but in flying control. With win-

Air Power for Patton's Army



Gen. O. P. Weyland
awards an Air Medal
to Col. Roger Browne,
his chief of staff.

ter's weather impending, the equipment, organization, and procedures for navigating and bombing assumed central importance for the command. Indeed, in the campaign to come, the establishment in late September of a provisional tactical control group to replace the fighter control center would prove a crucial decision.⁹

Refinements in Command and Control

During the drive across France, a fighter wing operated the fighter control center far removed from advance headquarters. General Weyland became convinced that this method of command and control was inefficient. Establishing a tactical control group to perform the functions of navigation and operational control at Etain solved the problem of divided responsibility, and it brought together all aircraft warning units, the fighter control squadron, and the Y-service radio intercept detachment in a single advance headquarters. Elements of the group operated from a tactical control center located directly behind the front, close by advance headquarters. In short, with consolidation of forces at the Third Army front, decentralization came to an end. Communications now would be centralized and positioned more directly under the command's control.¹⁰

Radar also became important once the command undertook to support position warfare in bad weather. Earlier, wing personnel at the fighter control center had used an area control board to plot and handle aircraft movement. Now, the tactical control center delegated this function to *five* fighter director post radar facilities in the XIX TAC flight control system (**Chart 4**). Each forward director post facility consisted of two British radars with their rotating

antenna arrays and control and communications trucks. While personnel used one radar to control aircraft, the other swept the area of coverage to provide early warning. Field orders passed from joint combat operations centers to the control group's tactical control center, where communications officers made flight control assignments for each of the director posts based on their radar coverage capability and handling capacity. The command sited the director posts so that close air support coverage could be provided all along the Third Army front. Data from the forward radars and radio equipment were transmitted back to the tactical control center, which maintained a complete picture of all scheduled missions and unknown and hostile tracks in the command area. This control proved especially important for, and effective in, diverting fighter-bombers to targets called in by reconnaissance aircraft. In this capacity, the director post units provided vectors to fighter-bombers on close cooperation missions to bring the aircraft to a specific point where the ground air liaison officer took over. Likewise, reconnaissance aircraft could be vectored to specific targets or general areas designated in the field order. Although these director posts proved their usefulness late in the drive across France, General Weyland and his staff considered that their limitations in range, radar resolution, and in the amount of control facilities available posed serious handicaps for fall and winter flying conditions.

The answer appeared with the arrival in late September of the American-built MEW radar AN/CPS-1, which supplemented the four forward director post radar facilities in the XIX TAC communications network. This huge, 60-ton radar offered a high-power output (3,000 mc), very short wavelength (10-cm wave), and a rotating antenna which resulted in superb coverage and excellent capability to accurately locate individual aircraft over a 200-mile front in all directions. MEW radar operators used two sets of indicator tubes. Half consisted of B-scans, which observers watched to report all aircraft in their assigned sectors to the tactical control center. Controllers handled the remaining tubes, known as planned position indicator tubes, to track assigned close air support formations from takeoff to landing.

A Direction Finder (D/F) Fixer Station at each radar site identified the formation and its bearing or position taken on all VHF transmissions. When correlated with blips on the MEW's planned position indicator tube, the D/F Fixer MEW could furnish a close air support formation leader with a variety of flight and target information. With its British height-finder radar, the MEW also could provide range, azimuth, and altitude of aircraft at ranges approaching 200 miles. The microwave radar's resolution and inherent accuracy were greater than any other Allied search radar. During intermittent testing in its first month of operation, the XIX TAC controllers found the new microwave radar to be accurate to a range of one-half mile with an azimuth error of one degree, which they considered acceptable for initial operations.¹¹

Air Power for Patton's Army

During August 1944, General Weyland had lobbied hard for improved radar that would provide long-range control of his aircraft far from their operating bases. Its introduction was delayed by difficulties in finding and converting one of the few alternate systems available. Only one of the five pre-production models had been modified in the spring of 1944 for mobile operations in Normandy, but it remained with General Quesada's command. A second MEW radar facility was operating as a fixed station on England's south coast to control nighttime aerial operations and to track incoming V-1 flying bombs. To answer Weyland's need for an offensive system, technicians made this model mobile, or at least transportable in vans, and sent it to the continent on September 8. After a test exercise at Chateaudun, where it performed well, the command moved it east to Nonsard, near Etain, on the twenty-second. Clearly, Weyland also based his decision to reorganize the flight control function in September on the timely acquisition of this long-range radar.¹²

The MEW radar immediately became the key element in XIX TAC's operations for flight control and as a device to direct reasonably accurate aircraft bombing in bad weather. Records for October 1944 indicate that it controlled about half of the command's daytime missions and all of the night photo and night fighter aircraft flights. In nighttime flying, it performed a ground controlled intercept (GCI) function. The night missions were unprecedented for the tactical air forces and only the radar system made possible the command's new night offensive capability. In a conference with Ninth Air Force officers on September 27, Weyland learned that the tactical air commands would likely receive night fighter squadrons of P-61s. Although the Black Widows had been operational since early summer, their effectiveness was less than desired because the tactical commands did not always know when or where they would be airborne. With the arrival of the 425th (P-61) Night Fighter Squadron in early October, XIX TAC controllers now had the ground equipment needed to operate night defensive patrol and offensive

A P-61 night fighter equipped with rockets.



intruder missions. Better command and control measures could not, however, alleviate the fundamental and ever-present problem of too few night fighters available to seriously impede German nighttime movements.¹³

Not surprisingly, the command experienced initial technical and operator problems with its new and unfamiliar equipment. As a line-of-sight instrument, optimum location of any radar is crucial, a fact made clear at the first site when communications officers discovered a blind spot to the southeast. Although siting processes proved to be slow, by November 20, the AN/CPS-1 had been moved five times. Technicians estimated its antenna life would not exceed ten movements from place to place, which became an incentive to develop effective siting techniques and procedures as quickly as possible.

Although the command remained enthusiastic about the new MEW radar and control facility from the start, the same could not be said for the SCR-584, a 10-cm microwave close control radar system. General Quesada's IX TAC had experimented with the short-range SCR-584 for close control in a number of operations in Normandy. This radar promised to provide more accurate navigation control, what airmen referred to as last-resort blind bombing. The set, however, with only a 30-mile practical operating range, required more personnel than the more powerful MEW radar and it proved more difficult to operate. When conducting a mission, a formation would rendezvous at a given altitude over a specified point with the lead aircraft positioned 500 feet ahead of the formation. Once the SCR-584 locked on to the lead plane, the pilot could take his formation to the assigned target. Course deviations en route could be made without difficulty because a moving spot of light on the underside of a horizontal map always indicated the plane's position to the controller. Under static conditions and with adequate operator training, a modified SCR-584 later became a useful addition to winter operations during the Ardennes Campaign. During the winter, however, the XIX TAC long-range MEW radar received an additional close-control modification, after which the command preferred it to the SCR-584 system for both winter flying and the mobile conditions of the drive across Germany in the spring of 1945.

After paying a visit to XIX TAC to observe installation of the long-range microwave radar in late September 1944, David Griggs, a technical advisor with the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, urged Weyland to acquire a number of new devices, including a ground-controlled (blind) approach (GCA) system to aid aircraft landing in poor weather, as well as an SCR-584, which he predicted could achieve blind bombing accuracy of 200 yards at a range of 30-35 miles. He admitted that "we have yet to learn how to make the most efficient use of it operationally" and recommended the command accept civilian experts from Ninth Air Force's Operational Research Section to monitor the MEW radar and the SCR-584, when the latter became available.¹⁴

In early October 1944, Weyland requested that his staff study the Griggs proposals and recommend a course of action. In contrast to officers at

Air Power for Patton's Army

Quesada's IX TAC, those at XIX TAC seemed wary of the civilians, perhaps because of the extravagant claims made for the new technology. Although Weyland's chief of staff Colonel Browne favored the new equipment and civilian operational research personnel, he told General Weyland that the senior XIX TAC intelligence, operations, and signals officers would accept an "ORS [Operational Research Section] in this Command as a necessary evil. No one wants it particularly but we all feel that it may do some good." As it was, the scientists and engineers proved their worth, especially after December 1, when British Branch Radiation Laboratory scientist J. E. Faulkner arrived to coordinate all radar-related activities of the command. In any event, with the addition of the MEW radar, the XIX TAC could now conduct effective long-range armed reconnaissance and escort missions in Northwest Europe under winter weather conditions. At the end of September, meanwhile, the XIX TAC prepared for operations in support of Third Army's assault on German defensive positions in the Mosel region.¹⁵

Stalemate along the Mosel

On the western front in early September 1944, General Eisenhower believed Allied armies could reach the Rhine River before constraints on resupply became critical or German defensive actions proved decisive. United States First Army patrols crossed the German border near Aachen on September 11, 1944, while Allied forces in southern France linked up with Eisenhower's northern troops in pursuit of what appeared to be a thoroughly beaten enemy. On the eastern front, Soviet armies had conquered the last areas of Russian territory from the Germans and slashed into Poland. Overhead, operating almost at will, British and American strategic bombers pounded Germany day and night. The Third Reich indeed appeared on the verge of collapse. By the end of September, however, the Allied optimism disappeared.¹⁶

To begin with, Montgomery's bold plan in the north, labeled Operation Market Garden, called for crossing three rivers in the Netherlands to outflank the West Wall, while employing an airborne-assisted assault. Approved by Eisenhower, British and American airborne troops were to seize a narrow corridor 65 miles deep and hold it, while Montgomery's British Second Army raced through on its way to the Zuider Zee. The airborne portion of the operation began on September 17 and proved successful. Stiff German resistance, however, slowed the British ground forces, while nearby German Panzer units isolated the northernmost British airborne troops at a small bridgehead north of the Lower Rhine, at Arnhem, the celebrated "bridge too far." Facing an increasingly desperate situation, on September 25 and 26, 2,000 British paratroopers, all that remained of an original 9,000-man force, retreated to the south bank of the Rhine. Though most of these surviving paratroopers man-

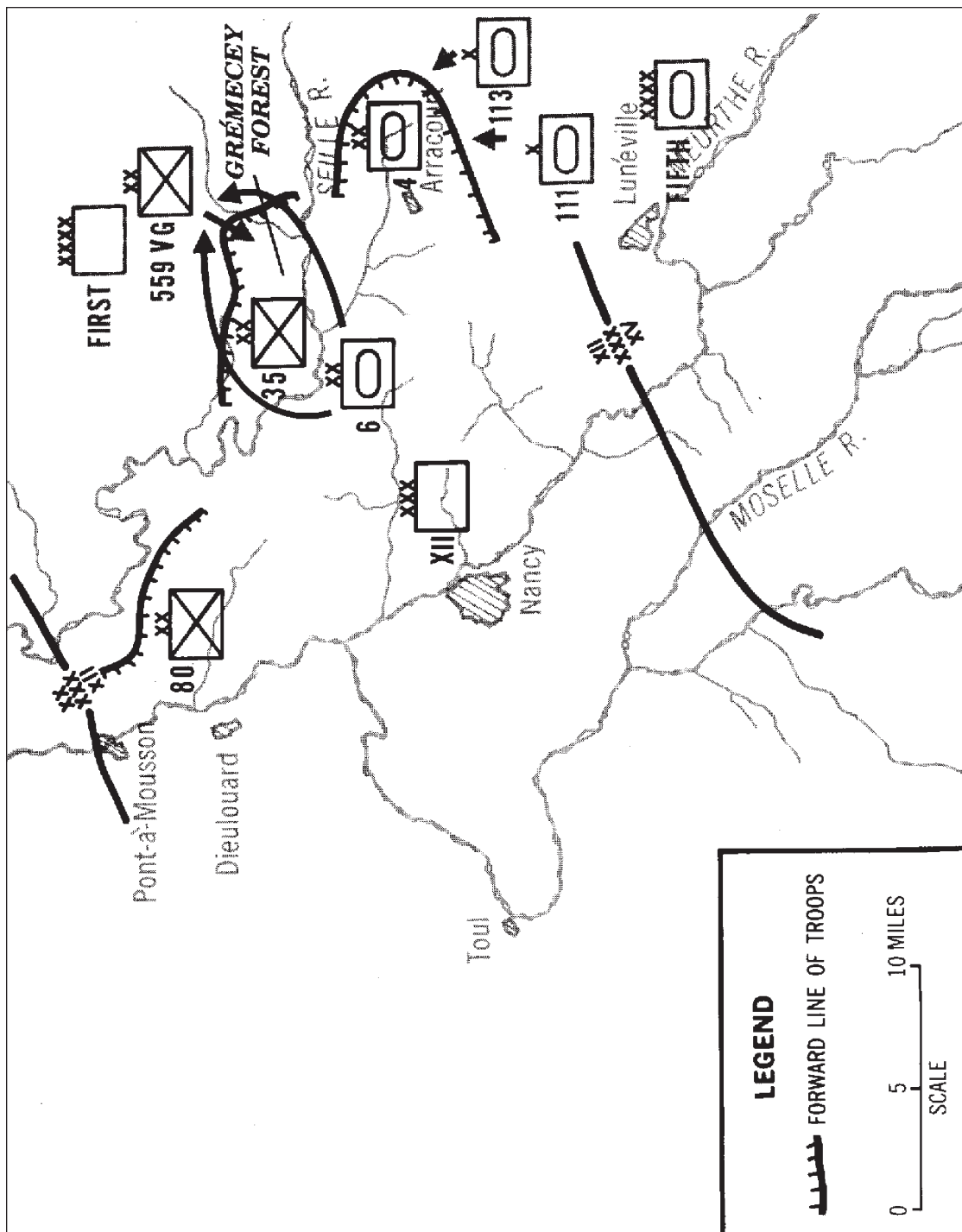
Stalemate in Lorraine

aged to reach Allied lines, Operation Market Garden failed entirely. Montgomery's forces had stalled and they neither outflanked the West Wall nor achieved a position for a strike against the Ruhr.¹⁷

Allied armies farther south also experienced the brunt of renewed and tenacious German resistance. General Hodges's U.S. First Army found itself too greatly extended to exploit the West Wall penetrations achieved at Aachen and in the Ardennes. In Alsace, the 6th Army Group made only limited gains against *Wehrmacht* troops who used the forested foothills of the Vosges Mountains to good advantage. Patton's U.S. Third Army drive bogged down when his troops encountered determined German defenders at the Mosel River and the fortified city of Metz. By month's end, the Allied assault in the west had stalled everywhere; it became increasingly clear that a sustained, renewed offensive would have to await replenishment of supplies. Montgomery's troops captured Antwerp on September 4, 1944, the Belgian port city crucial to an Allied logistical buildup, but his forces neglected to clear all of the Schelde Estuary of its German defenders. Despite being surrounded and isolated, elements of Gen. Kurt Student's battle-seasoned *First Parachute Army* now blocked passage of Allied shipping into and out of the port. Allied military leaders, it must be said, at first failed to see the threat that this situation posed and days passed before General Eisenhower pressured Montgomery to clear the Schelde Estuary of its German defenders. Newly promoted to Field Marshal,¹⁸ Montgomery in mid-October finally turned his full attention from Operation Market Garden to the challenge on the Schelde. Much to the surprise of the baton-wielding British commander, despite intense assaults, the tenacious Germans retained control of the port approaches for three more weeks, until they surrendered on November 8. Even then, until the last mines were located and cleared from estuary waters, Antwerp's port facilities remained closed to Allied vessels until November 28, 1944!¹⁹

In the south, Omar Bradley's directive in late September 1944, called for U.S. Third Army to assume a defensive posture and hold its position in Lorraine until supplies reached levels that would permit a major offensive (**Map 9**). Never content simply to hold a position, Patton advised Third Army leaders on September 25 that a "defensive posture" did not imply an absence of contact with the enemy. Rather, while consolidating, regrouping, and rotating personnel, Third Army would pursue "limited objective attacks" against the enemy.²⁰ The XIX TAC supported these modest attacks and conducted an interdiction program against the *Wehrmacht*, while preparing for the impending, major joint offensive.

During one of these attacks in late September 1944, General Eddy's XII Corps found itself engaged in a sometimes desperate tank battle at Arracourt, while to the north in the Gramecey Forest, a grim, close-quarters infantry struggle continued for control of the bridgehead there (**Map 10**).²¹ On September 26, while XII Corps consolidated its position northeast of Nancy



Map 10

German Counterattacks Against XII Corps: September 19–30, 1944

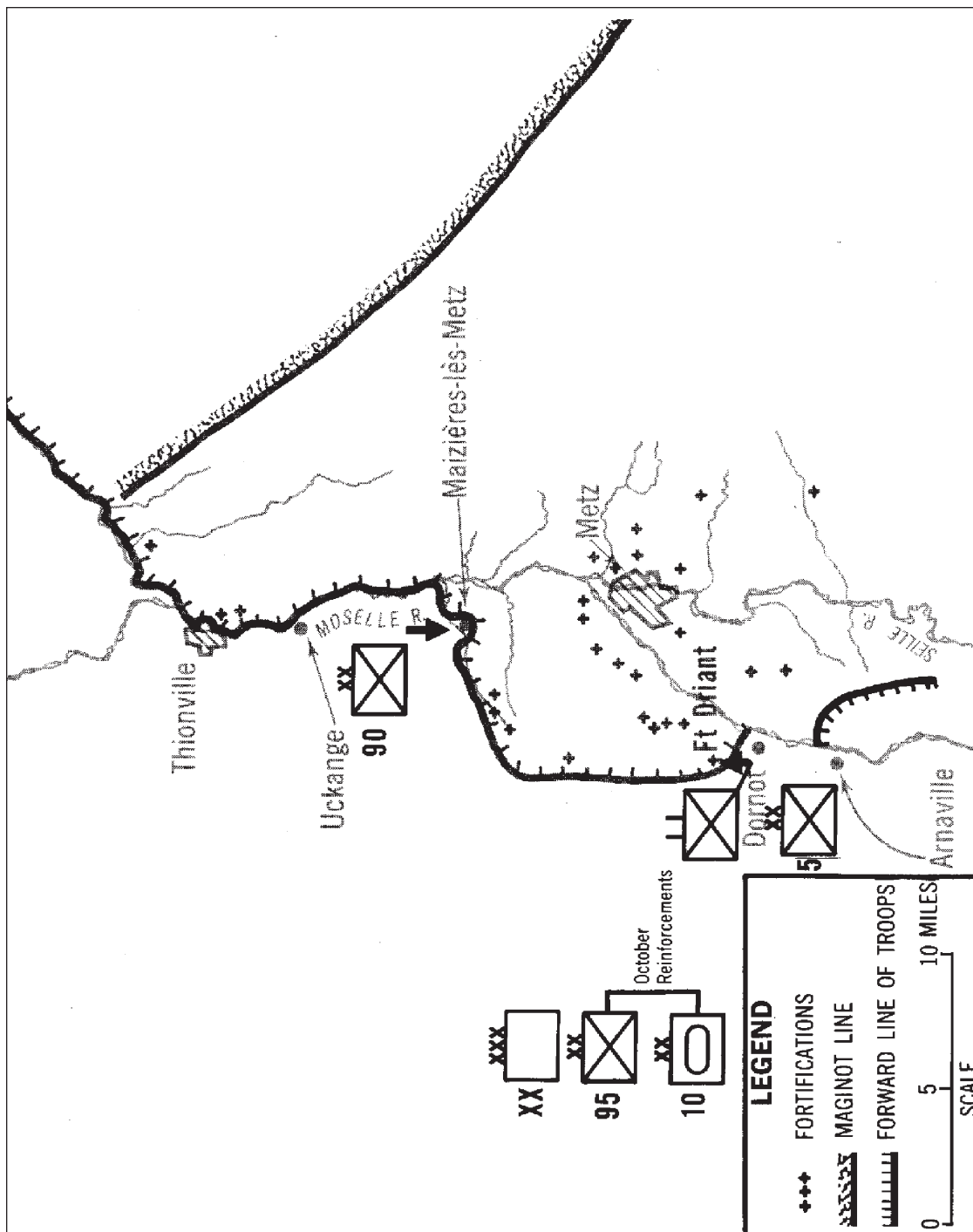
Reprinted from: Christopher R. Gabel, "The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, Sep-Dec 1944," (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), p. 18.

and fought off heavy enemy counterattacks, General Patton ordered General Walker in the south to capture the fortified town of Metz and sweep to the Rhine. This would prove much too large a limited objective for two supply-short infantry divisions and one armored division spread along a 40-mile front. Earlier, Patton's forces assaulted the outlying forts to the southwest of the city on a small scale, but using only the Michelin road maps available to them at the time, they had no idea of the challenge they faced.

As it turned out, when French archival maps and drawings of the Maginot Line arrived from Paris in early October, Third Army leaders learned that the old Metz fortress complex consisted of 43 interconnecting forts surrounding the city on both sides of the Mosel River. Many held up to 2,000 personnel and housed heavy artillery in steel- and concrete-reinforced turrets. These heavily defended forts also would prove an equally tough target for XIX TAC fighter-bombers. On September 26, for example, while Walker's forces prepared to attack Fort Driant five miles southwest of Metz, the 405th Fighter Group, the Raiders, flew in bad weather to bomb the fort using 1,000-lb. bombs and napalm. The results offered little encouragement to those hoping for a quick victory (**Map 11**).²²

On September 27, the first good flying day in several weeks, the 5th Infantry Division's probing attack at Ft. Driant met fanatical resistance. The 405th Fighter Group's six-mission supporting effort again had little effect in spite of accurate bombing and correspondingly high praise from the ground forces. Next day, XIX TAC stepped up its effort by sending squadrons from four groups against the Metz forts for a total of 13 missions and 156 sorties. The command preferred using squadron-sized missions and continued this practice for most of the fall campaign. Under conditions of fewer daylight hours and limited forces, XIX TAC provided maximum flexibility by allowing a fighter group to divide its forces, if necessary, among close support and interdiction missions. It also became customary at this time for each squadron in a group to be assigned to support a particular army division.

The Metz mission results of September 28, 1944, did not please General Weyland. Using pillboxes and turrets as aiming points, his pilots had bombed accurately, yet had apparently produced little damage. Ninth Air Force became especially interested in the effect of napalm on the Metz targets and Colonel Hallett, XIX TAC's intelligence officer, undertook a study of firebomb results during this attempt to subdue Ft. Driant's defenders. His investigation of attacks on the twenty-eighth revealed that the 5th Infantry Division reported large fires lasting as long as 30 minutes. When a reconnaissance patrol attempted to move forward shortly after the bombing, however, German defenders in the fort kept it pinned down by heavy and accurate automatic weapons fire. Unfortunately, Hallett's findings proved typical for fighter-bomber attacks in support of assaults against fixed, fortified defenses. The only note of encouragement was that the attacks often stunned the defenders and temporarily silenced the guns.²³



Map 11
XX Corps Operations: October 1944

Reprinted from: Christopher R. Gabel, "The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, Sep-Dec 1944," (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), p. 25.

Stalemate in Lorraine

General Weyland and his staff expressed their frustration at the evening briefing on September 28. After assessing mission results, Weyland concluded that the forts were “not a proper target” for fighter-bombers. As in the case of Brittany, his arguments focused on the high level of effort and cost for the limited results achieved. On the previous day the command lost six aircraft to flak and he expected the flak threat to worsen. For Weyland and his staff veterans, it must have seemed like a rerun of the Cherbourg and Brest Operations. They believed the Metz fortifications required bombing by heavy and medium bombers. General Weyland’s air support efforts in the weeks ahead invariably turned to coordinating heavy and medium bombers of the Eighth and Ninth Air Forces for his joint air-ground plans.²⁴

Later in the evening of September 28, 1944, Patton’s chief of staff Gaffey called Weyland to request priority support next day for Manton Eddy’s XII Corps, whose 35th Infantry and 4th Armored Divisions came under heavy counterattack at Arracourt. Weyland promised Gaffey a squadron arriving overhead every hour and he gave that assignment to the 405th Fighter Group. The Raiders responded with 96 sorties and, in the words of the Army historian of the Lorraine Campaign, “nearly leveled the village and cut up the German reserves assembling there, thus weakening still further the ability of the enemy to exploit an attack that had been initiated successfully.” The *Wehrmacht* counterattack was blunted.²⁵

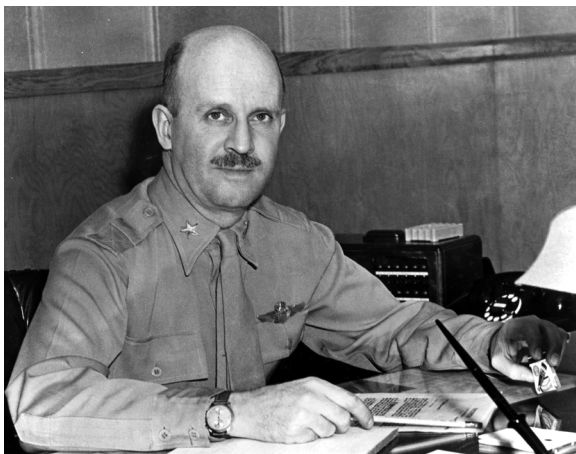
In the weeks ahead, General Weyland found his reduced command assuming new missions, straining the forces available for each assignment. For example, the command assumed responsibility for supporting XV Corps, which had been transferred to the U.S. Seventh Army, on Third Army’s right flank, until aircraft of the XII TAC under Brig. Gen. Gordon P. Saville could be based closer to the Lorraine front. Support for the 5th Infantry Division at Metz decreased to only two squadrons of Curry’s Cougars in the 36th Group. A Ninth Air Force directive on September 25, established rail-cutting as the first priority for fighter-bombers. This interdiction program intensified in October, but it would be hampered by continuing bad weather and the relatively small number of aircraft that Weyland had available and which he was willing to commit to the effort. On September 29, the other groups of XIX TAC flew fighter sweeps against German airfields or armed reconnaissance against rail interdiction targets. Along with close support of XX and XII Corps efforts, these three missions—close air support, interdiction, and fighter sweeps—comprised the bulk of XIX TAC’s flying in the Lorraine Campaign. Bad weather on the last day of September prevented all flying and the winter weather ahead threatened an effective interdiction campaign against German ground forces. With the XIX TAC grounded, Third Army might rely on its artillery for close support to continue its limited-objective attacks. The interdiction rail-cutting program, however, received a setback every day of bad weather. Only continuous air attacks on transport held the prospect of keeping

Air Power for Patton's Army

German supply lines shut and the Third Army battlefield isolated. The European weather worsened.²⁶

General Weyland faced bad flying weather and conflicting aerial priorities throughout the October 1944 buildup. As part of a major Allied bombing effort, Ninth Air Force announced an expanded interdiction campaign on October 2 against rail traffic, marshaling yards, and bridges on the Rhine and Saar rivers. At the same time, XIX TAC was expected to furnish close air support to the Third Army because, for General Patton, any defensive stance on the ground involved limited-objective attacks against Germans. In that cause, Maj. Gen. S. LeRoy Irwin's 5th Infantry Division struggled to take Fort Driant during the first two weeks of October, suffering an incredible 50 percent casualty rate before Patton conceded failure. As early as October 3, with both Patton and Weyland observing, General Irwin's forces breached perimeter defenses of the fort assisted by strong air support from the 405th and 358th Fighter Groups, *after* medium bombers from the IX Bombardment Division had first stunned the German defenders.²⁷ Third Army lauded the support of both fighter groups.

It was one thing to penetrate Ft. Driant's outer defenses and quite another to gain access to its underground, interconnected defensive network. German officer school candidates, who happened to be battle-hardened former NCOs, led a ferocious German counterattack which halted the American forces. Intense fighting continued around the fort until October 12, when Patton reluctantly directed his forces to withdraw and maintain a containing operation. Elsewhere along the front, however, Patton's so-called defensive operations escalated. The XX Corps' 90th Infantry Division continued methodically to reduce Maizieres-les-Metz, the town six miles north of Metz that blocked the only unfortified approach to the city. Other units laid siege to other Metz fortresses, while forward units pressed ahead to enlarge bridgeheads across the



**Brig. Gen.
Gordon P. Saville,
commander,
XII Tactical Air Force**

Stalemate in Lorraine

Mosel north and south of the city. During Third Army's buildup for the planned November offensive, it continued to rotate troops out of the front line for training in the reduction of fortifications (**Map 11**).²⁸

General Patton became increasingly frustrated with the lack of forward progress during October 1944. At the army's morning briefing on October 13 he urged his air commander to clobber the Driant fort in retaliation for the casualties it had inflicted on his 5th Infantry Division. Weyland turned that task over to his operations officer, Colonel Ferguson, but little aerial retaliation occurred prior to the major offensive in early November. The command flew only one bombing mission against the Metz fortifications during the last two weeks of October. Directed against three small fortified towns south of the city, it involved but one squadron from the 405th Fighter Group on the twenty-second. Weyland considered interdiction targets more important than the fortifications, and General Patton, who seemed to have recovered from his frustration, did not pressure the air arm further.

Both Patton and Weyland could agree that the key to unlocking the Metz fortress complex lay in a massive bombing effort in conjunction with a major land attack. Earlier, on October 2, 1944, Weyland and his staff had met with General Vandenberg, Ninth Air Force commander, to discuss responsibilities and procedures for use of the medium and heavy bombers in tactical operations. They decided to request heavy bombers for the planned offensives in the First and Third Army areas and they agreed on 48 hours' notice to complete necessary arrangements. Even at this early date in the Lorraine Campaign, air leaders had begun long-range planning for the joint operations to come.²⁹

Meanwhile, XIX TAC concentrated on the rail interdiction program, with General Patton's full support. On October 5, Ninth Air Force revised target assignments for its medium bombers and fighters with inner and outer lines of interdiction. It divided the targets among tactical air commands accordingly. The XIX TAC's allotment consisted of eight rail lines in Third Army's sector from Coblenz to Landau and ten lines east of the Rhine. On October 7, Patton lifted the ban on bridge destruction, although it was not until after the nineteenth, when Ninth Air Force again directed all four tactical air commands to make interdiction their top priority, that mission results showed a pronounced number of bridge targets attacked.³⁰ The XIX TAC historian on October 7, 1944, claimed the "all out campaign against RR traffic was paying dividends" because the enemy had resorted to barge traffic on the Rhine-Marne canal. Understandably, policing this canal also became a major command activity and command pilots achieved good success, especially after the 362d proposed and carried out a lock-destroying mission. Nevertheless, reconnaissance reports after the first week in October indicated German traffic continued to be heavy west of the Rhine, which tempered initial optimism.³¹

Army chief of staff General Marshall visited Third Army headquarters on October 7, 1944, and praised the accomplishments of the Third Army-XIX TAC

Air Power for Patton's Army

team. He also attended what General Weyland referred to in his diary as a special briefing. In fact, Weyland, too, attended these special briefings either in General Patton's personal van or the Third Army chief of staff's office prior to the regular Third Army morning staff briefing. These particular briefings normally occurred every morning and, as only became known publicly many years later, involved Ultra communications intelligence. By early October, Patton had received Ultra assessments for more than two months. Ultra specialist Maj. Melvin C. Helfers joined Third Army at its Knutsford headquarters shortly after Patton's arrival in England, but remained on the sidelines and unknown to Patton until his information, so vital to Third Army operations, was brought to Patton's attention. This occurred on August 6, when Ultra forecast a German counterattack in the direction of Patton's troops at Avranches. Armed with this information, Major Helfers convinced Third Army's intelligence chief, Col. Oscar W. Koch, that Patton must be briefed on this German plan. Duly impressed by the Ultra data, Patton expressed surprise that he had not been informed earlier of Helfers's intelligence role at Third Army. In any event, the next morning the General summoned Helfers to personally conduct the first of what became routine Ultra briefings for Patton and a few other select Third Army officers.

Although General Weyland began attending the Third Army Ultra briefings consistently only in early October, he had been receiving Ultra data on *Luftwaffe* plans and dispositions since mid-June, while he was still in England. During operations in France, his fireman duties in support of Third Army's offensive often precluded regularly scheduled briefings from his own Ultra specialist, Maj. Harry M. Grove. In addition to meeting with General Weyland when feasible, Major Grove provided the XIX TAC's intelligence chief, Colonel Hallett, with daily updates on German air force activities. By mid-October, and with the Lorraine Campaign well underway, Weyland brought Colonel Browne, his chief of staff, and Major Grove to the Third Army Ultra briefings when *Luftwaffe* data proved especially important.³²

There is little disagreement about Ultra's importance in supplying Third Army with the enemy's ground order of battle information on a regular basis, but its usefulness for the tactical air arm appears more questionable. General Quesada has argued that Ultra's main contribution was "to instill confidence and provide guidance to the conduct of war...rather than the tactics of the war." No doubt this came from following changes in the *Luftwaffe's* air order of battle. Indeed, Ultra allowed Allied intelligence officers to follow the major *Luftwaffe* recovery, redeployment, and first serious use of jet fighters in the fall. Though one can argue that Ultra's information provided knowledge of strong enemy concentrations, which meant heavy flak areas to avoid, the airmen seem to have relied on the Y-service radio intercept operation for their best intelligence of immediate *Luftwaffe* plans. Beyond this, tactical and photographic reconnaissance assured the command of systematic coverage of the battle zone, weather permitting.³³

Stalemate in Lorraine

Despite a weak *Luftwaffe* presence on Third Army's front, General Weyland remained determined to guard against a possible resurgent air threat. The command's intelligence chief, Colonel Hallett, studied the problem and on October 6, 1944, he advised the combat operations officer that the presence of 350 German fighters at 30–40 airfields in the Saar represented a force that could not be ignored. He suggested that higher headquarters develop a coordinated plan of attack. Failing this, XIX TAC should hit all of the airfields within range of its fighter-bombers. Hallett awaited pictures from the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group, whose efforts had been hampered by the weather, before he prepared the final target folders. Unknown to Weyland's intelligence chief, the *Luftwaffe* had already begun building up its forces for a counterattack that Hitler began planning as early as mid-September. On October 8, Weyland sent three groups against some key German airfields where tactical reconnaissance reported a major buildup. Led by P-51s of the 354th Fighter Group, command pilots attacked five airfields with impressive results. They claimed seven aircraft destroyed in air combat, 19 more on the ground, and possibly an additional 26 damaged. Although General Weyland continued to worry about the *Luftwaffe* threat, his forces did not strike German airfields purposefully again until the end of the month. The command focused on interdiction, but bad weather continued to hamper that effort. Following the attacks against German air forces on October 8, for example, air operations had to be scrubbed for the next two days.³⁴

General Weyland used the nonflying time to deal with support problems. Airfields, especially, needed attention. The persistent rains of September and October 1944, along with heavy use of command fields by heavily laden C-47 transports resupplying Third Army, had taken their toll on runways and taxiways. On October 8, Weyland inspected the airstrip at Etain, which he wanted as the future base of the 362d Fighter Group and the 425th Night Fighter Squadron. The C-47 landings had ruined the runway, and the previous evening's rain forced engineers to abandon their attempt to lay Hessian strip, the bituminous surface used most frequently during the drive across France. The engineers required three or four dry weather days to complete a runway, and rain fell nearly every day. General Weyland strongly argued for switching to pierced steel plank surfacing, but Ninth Air Force refused, citing availability and shipping weight. A steel-plank airfield required 3,500 tons of material, while only 350 tons of Hessian proved sufficient to cover the same field. At Vitry, rain in October softened the runway to the point where it became unserviceable. Consequently, the 358th Fighter Group Orange Tails moved to Mourmelon, home of the 406th Fighter Group. From the command's viewpoint, however, two groups operating from a single base placed an undesirable strain on personnel and facilities. Weyland also lobbied to have a pierced steel-plank field laid at a future site near Metz for two groups, and in this case he succeeded.³⁵

Air Power for Patton's Army

By late October 1944, pierced steel-plank runways also experienced rapid deterioration and required considerable maintenance. Officials referred to reduced operations resulting from these conditions, although the record is not specific or entirely clear how seriously the problem affected operations. The engineers knew, however, that the incessant rains loosened the grading and soil compaction. The solution seemed to be a crushed rock base for all airstrips, but this meant finding rock in sufficient quantity, crushing it and shipping it efficiently in spite of its enormous weight. If the rains of October created one set of operational problems, the cold weather expected in November would intensify difficulties with the Hessian-surfaced fields because the cold would crack the tar seal, thus permitting propeller wash to blow the stuffing loose. Had they been granted three or four more days of good weather in early October, the engineers declared, they would have been able to winterize all XIX TAC airfields before the onset of severe weather. The command's experience in October underscored an oft-forgotten axiom that "air power begins and ends on the ground."³⁶

Despite the rain and mud in October 1944, the command's aircraft maintenance operation experienced no major difficulties, something that could not be said for supply. Although the supply situation improved with the establishment of dumps in the forward area, key problems affected the command throughout the winter. Back in September, the command reported shortages of replacement P-51 aircraft and related spare parts, yet repeated requests for resupply were not met. By November, the 354th Fighter Group, for example,

The lab of the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group processing recce photos.



Stalemate in Lorraine

reported a shortage of 30 aircraft in the group. Given the Eighth Air Force's priority claim on P-51s for bomber escort duty, no solution appeared in sight. The P-51 problem doubtless contributed to a decision in November to convert the Pioneer Mustang group to P-47s. Although officials attributed this conversion to the need for more fighter-bomber support and reduced air defense requirements, the adverse effects of insufficient replacement aircraft on the XIX TAC mission doubtless contributed to the decision.³⁷

The flow of P-47 planes and parts, meanwhile, remained uninterrupted during October and November. By mid-October, all groups had at least the prescribed 70 aircraft; by the end of October, the new P-47D-30 model with its improved electrical bomb release began arriving. Soon it became the dominant Thunderbolt model in theater. The only subsequent improvement involved installation of the underwing pylons for rocket launching. The 362d Fighter Group was next in line after the 406th for five-inch rockets, but a shortage of parts delayed the conversion. By the end of October, only one squadron of the 362d completed this modification.³⁸

Finally, the XIX TAC commander had to deal with pilot replacement. The problem was not that the command received too few fighter pilots—although only 99 pilots arrived in October 1944 to fill the 162 vacancies, the surplus of 63 from the month before balanced the allotment. The main difficulty involved the experience level of the newly arriving airmen. Early in the month the command historian observed that new pilots had very little flying time in fighters and appeared especially weak in gunnery and bombing. Furthermore, the command had neither the facilities nor sufficient gasoline to train these replacements properly. Although General Weyland complained to General Vandenberg, Ninth Air Force did little until December 10. That day Weyland evidently had had enough; he refused to accept 11 replacement pilots who collectively had almost no training in fighter operations. Ninth Air Force approved his decision and promised to look into the stateside training program.³⁹

Planning an Offensive

While XIX TAC carried out a variety of missions in support of Third Army's limited-objective attacks and worked to improve the command's logistics and control functions, General Weyland and his staff joined their colleagues at Third Army headquarters in planning a major offensive. The logistic situation remained the key hurdle. During mid-October 1944, while Patton's forces continued fighting house-to-house in Mazieres-les-Metz and consolidating their positions in the XII Corps area, Third Army supply officers worked diligently to build up supply depot stocks through a rigorous conservation and rationing program, highlighted by a 25 percent reduction in the gasoline issue.⁴⁰

Air Power for Patton's Army

While Third Army focused on logistics, the XIX TAC concentrated on its rail interdiction program. Once the heavy overcast lifted on October 11, 1944, for example, the command followed the practice of designating one group, usually the 405th Fighter Group, for close air support, while the other four flew armed reconnaissance missions. After October 23, however, the command stopped flying scheduled ground force support missions and devoted its entire effort to armed reconnaissance, escort, and at times, fighter-bomber sweeps of German airfields.

Waiting to take the offensive while his supply base was replenished offered no comfort to General Patton. On October 18, he advocated a major offensive even if it had to be undertaken on a shoestring. At the morning briefing, his staff suggested two alternative plans for enveloping Metz and pushing on to the Siegfried Line. Although in attendance, Weyland made no comment when the Third Army commander called for an immediate offensive, but he personally considered it ill-advised to attack before all major army elements were fully equipped and prepared. Despite the co-equal intent of published doctrine, Weyland and Patton were not on an equal footing in rank and Weyland never pretended otherwise. In any case, the joint planning process was officially underway. Armed with Third Army's plans, on October 19, Weyland prepared a directive for his staff to develop an air plan for the offensive. At the same time, another air plan called for sending fighter-bombers against the Etang de Lindre Dam in what would prove to be an impressive XIX TAC first.⁴¹

The dam-busting idea had been raised a few days earlier, on October 13, 1944. The dam lay three miles southeast of Dieuze and right in the path of XII Corps' proposed line of advance. The corps staff feared that the enemy might destroy the dam during their assault and cause the Seille River to overflow, isolating forward elements and forestalling the entire Third Army advance. This dilemma foreshadowed another that would confront Allied armies in the north on an even larger scale in November, when First and Ninth Armies on their way to the Rhine needed to cross the Roer River. Germans on the high ground at Schmidt in the Huertgen Forest controlled two dams on the upper reaches of the little river which, if opened, could flood the low-lying plain and forestall the Allied advance. In Lorraine, XII Corps wanted the Seille River dam destroyed in support of its limited-objective attack. Because of the precision required, the planners canceled the original request for heavy bombers in favor of fighter-bombers.

Weyland assigned the task to Col. Joseph Laughlin, the aggressive commander of the 362d Fighter Group, which frequently received the command's most challenging missions.⁴² Colonel Laughlin and several officers spent hours at headquarters in Nancy studying large-scale photographs taken by the 31st Photo Squadron and diagrams and specifications obtained from local records. They even consulted a professor from the University of Nancy. The



High-level strategy dictated breaching the Etang de Lindre Dam at Dieuze, France, before the Third Army offensive in November, preventing the Germans from releasing the water between Patton's advancing troops and thereby separate them from supplies after the attack had begun. The photo below shows the extent of the breach and how successfully the 362d's Thunderbolts carried out their mission in spite of a difficult target defended by very heavy flak.



Air Power for Patton's Army

preparation paid off handsomely. On October 20, with Colonel Laughlin in the lead, two P-47 squadrons armed with 1,000-lb. armor-piercing bombs, dove from 7,000 to 100 feet in the face of heavy flak and scored at least six direct hits. The bombs made a 90-foot break in the dam; the resultant flood waters engulfed the town of Dieuze and isolated German units in the area. The XII Corps used the disruption caused by the flood to launch a successful limited-objective attack three days later.⁴³

The next day, October 21, 1944, the 405th Fighter Group flew missions in support of three different corps. One of them, bombing a town and troop concentrations, assisted XII Corps' 26th Infantry Division in its limited-objective attack 22 miles east of Nancy that elicited high praise from the ground controller. General Weyland had to be encouraged when General Spaatz visited the air command that day and remarked that "the Third U.S. Army-XIX TAC team is the finest we have yet produced." Even if Spaatz's declaration was intended only to boost morale, the record of this air-ground team already merited praise.⁴⁴

Although bad weather severely curtailed flying during the last week of October, team officials continued to work on the joint plan for Third Army's offensive. Scheduled to begin on November 5, 1944, the Third Army plan called for crossing the Mosel north and south of Metz, entirely bypassing the strongest forts, and pushing on to the Rhine River. Metz would be taken later by XX Corps through encirclement and infiltration.⁴⁵ On October 22, Weyland's intelligence and operations chiefs presented the air plan, which the air commander discussed the next day in a joint meeting with General Patton, the Third Army staff, and the two corps commanders. Essentially the air proposal called for a large preliminary air assault to neutralize the forts and strongpoints. Heavy bombers would pound the outlying Metz forts while medium bombers hit smaller forts, supply dumps, and troop concentrations in two key areas. The XIX TAC fighter-bombers would attack all known command posts in the vicinity as well as fly armed reconnaissance missions against all road and rail traffic and enemy airfields in close proximity to Third Army's front. (At this time, General Weyland did not know what would be the size of the bombing force available for Third Army's use.) Army leaders expressed satisfaction with the plan, and Weyland indicated he intended to request two additional fighter groups for tactical support. The planners dubbed this offensive Operation Madison.⁴⁶

Despite the fact that Generals Patton and Weyland had agreed on the joint plan, the path ahead during the next week and a half was far from smooth. For one thing, higher authorities reminded them immediately that the Third Army sector of the Allied front continued to be judged second in importance to the First Army area opposite Aachen. Originally, Allied plans called for the main effort against the Siegfried Line to be led by General Hodges's First Army. Now that Aachen had been secured, Hodges's plan called for an attack

Stalemate in Lorraine

toward Cologne south of the Ruhr, also beginning November 5. Politics and prestige, however, never seemed far removed from Allied decision-making and Field Marshal Montgomery delayed returning an American infantry division borrowed earlier from the 12th Army Group. Under these circumstances, General Bradley, 12th Army Group commander, postponed First Army's offensive and decided to allow General Patton to begin Operation Madison on the fifth. First Army would then launch Operation Queen, an attack against the Roer River defenses, a week after the initiation of Operation Madison (**Map 9**). At the end of October a decision between the two planned offensives had not yet been reached.⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Third Army's supply shortfalls continued. Even though ammunition and rations stocks improved, available gas reached only 67 percent of the level requested. General Weyland had his problems, too. Meeting with Ninth Air Force Commander General Vandenberg on October 27, he learned that not only would XIX TAC not receive two additional fighter groups for Operation Madison, but the command instead would lose another group, this time to General Saville's XII TAC for its operations in southeastern France. Moreover, as the Ninth Air Force commander explained, General Bradley's focus on First Army in the north meant dividing the fighter groups that remained: six for General Quesada's IX TAC and four each for General Weyland's XIX TAC and General Nugent's XXIX TAC.⁴⁸

Weyland objected vigorously, but to no avail. The next day, he met with his wing commander, Brig. Gen. Homer "Tex" Saunders and Colonel Ferguson, combat operations chief. If the decision could not be overturned, they recommended relinquishing the 358th Orange Tails. Still upset, Weyland expressed displeasure to General Patton later that day in a formal memorandum. The proposed fighter group allotment, he asserted, "appears most inequitable, and if it goes through we are in a bad way." The ratio of fighter-

General Patton (right) is removing a new pistol from his holster to show Gens. Hodges (left), and Bradley (center).



Air Power for Patton's Army

bomber support for the offensive, he averred, penalized Third Army because the IX and XXIX TAC groups would be supporting proportionally smaller ground forces. He reminded General Patton that all of the Ninth's 13 bomber groups remained under centralized control and could be shifted easily to influence the action in any area. The rapid shifting of fighter support, divided among three tactical air commands, under the circumstances could not be depended upon to meet exigencies. He considered it essential that XIX TAC be allowed at least five groups for Operation Madison. "I contend," he said, "that First Army can still have priority without robbing us."⁴⁹

Patton promptly called General Bradley on the matter. Then he, General Weyland, and Col. Paul D. Harkins, Third Army's deputy chief of staff, drove to Luxembourg on October 29 to discuss the issue further with Bradley and Ninth Air Force officers. Their argument did not prove convincing. As Patton confided to his diary: "tried to move a fighter-bomber group for Weyland but lost all the air guys to First and Ninth Armies." The 358th Fighter Group prepared to transfer prior to the offensive, even though XII TAC would not play a significant role in Operation Madison. In the end, Ninth Air Force allowed the Orange Tail to fly one last operation for XIX TAC after all.⁵⁰

The bad weather ended temporarily and October 28 and 29 became two of the best flying days of the month. The command used its good fortune to concentrate on interdiction targets: rail and road bridges both east and west of the Rhine. The armed reconnaissance missions brought out the *Luftwaffe* this time, and the 354th Fighter Group Mustangs again set the pace in air encounters. Attacked by more than 100 Bf 109s near Heidelberg, the pioneer group tallied claims of 24 destroyed and eight damaged in aerial combat, while losing only three of its own. Weather again forced cancellation of the interdiction program the last two days of the month. By now the command began focusing on bridges rather than rail cuts, and it ended the month claiming 17 bridges destroyed and 22 damaged. The command admitted, however, while the bridges proved to be suitable targets, the program achieved only limited success. General Weyland did not question sending squadrons of 12 aircraft, each armed with two 500-lb. general-purpose bombs, against each bridge. The bridges, however, proved to be heavily defended by flak batteries and very difficult targets to hit. As later studies would show, the fighter-bombers would have had greater success against bridges if they had been armed with the larger, 1,000-lb. bombs. Moreover, like the rail-cutting program, the airmen needed better flying weather to bomb the German-held bridges consistently. Too often mission reports revealed that pilots flew against secondary targets because of overcast conditions in the original target area. When the command reviewed its flying effort for October 1944, it was not surprised to find that only 12 days had been completely flyable, 12 partially flyable, and seven totally nonoperational. Forecasters predicted the weather in November would be worse.⁵¹

Stalemate in Lorraine

As October drew to a close, Weyland looked back on a month in which his command contended with bad weather, strengthened German defenses, Third Army's inability to mount a sustained offensive, and requirements that called for a battlefield interdiction program and a variety of additional missions—and all had to be managed with reduced aerial forces. At month's end, however, plans for Operation Madison, aimed at crossing the Mosel and driving for the Rhine, neared completion. Patton seemed determined to attack the Germans entrenched in Lorraine even though the offensive was viewed elsewhere as a secondary attack and even though his ground forces were short-handed. Third Army supply officers still believed a major offensive could not be sustained at this time, but D-Day remained set for November 5, weather permitting.⁵²

From Metz to the Siegfried Line

Throughout the week preceding Operation Madison, General Weyland met daily with the Third Army staff on matters of coordination, timing, and target priorities. As the air commander on the air-ground team, he played a crucial role in the planning and execution of the joint operation. On November 1, 1944, for example, two officers from Eighth Air Force Bomber Command visited Weyland to discuss Madison targets for their heavy bombers. Next day he attended a conference at Third Army headquarters, where a visiting General Bradley received a detailed review of Operation Madison. Bradley told Patton that First Army could not be ready to attack until the tenth; Patton replied that his Third Army could attack on 24 hours' notice. Bradley gave him the "green light" to launch Operation Madison on November 8.⁵³

During this conference, Third Army supply officers happily noted that the logistics situation continued to improve, especially as a result of bulk gasoline shipments delivered by rail. How much of this improvement represented unauthorized supplies purloined from other commands remains unclear. Patton seldom interfered with the innovative activities of his supply officers, who continued to enhance a notorious reputation for "requisitioning" army materiel originally destined elsewhere. After other ground officers discussed various minor changes in the assault plan, Weyland presented the air plan to Generals Bradley and Patton. He discussed the various adjustments that had been made in terms of lines of attack and specific targets and he explained realistically what could be expected from his forces with his command reduced from five to four groups of fighter-bombers. With bad weather anticipated and the shorter flying days of winter to contend with, the ground forces would receive about 25 percent of the aerial support they had received in the summer. Consequently, the timing of various parts of the operation would be essential if air support were to achieve its objectives. Clearly Weyland attempted to make a case for receiving air reinforcements now that Operation Madison would lead the Allied assault on the western front.⁵⁴



Gasoline for Patton's Third Army was flown from England in C-47s (top and center), then moved by truck and rail to supply dumps near his armored columns.



Stalemate in Lorraine

On November 3, 1944, Patton, Weyland, and their staffs conferred again at Third Army headquarters on target priorities and the timing of attacks for the various infantry and tank units. Late that morning, General Weyland revised the air plan to include maximum bomber support. Afterward, Ferguson and Hallett flew to Ninth Air Force headquarters with the published plan to request full heavy bomber and medium bomber support from the fifth through the eighth of November, and possibly to the ninth, as well. The air proposal called for heavy bombers to attack ten forts commanding the road approaches to Metz and the medium bombers to strike four forts in the Metz area, eight supply dumps, and German troop concentrations in the Bois-des-Secourt and Chateau Salins areas about 12 miles east of Nancy. Fighter-bombers would attack nine command posts using 500-lb. general-purpose bombs with delay fuzes and napalm, where available. Additionally, the fighters would bomb eight German airfields on D-Day. Weyland considered this plan extremely ambitious, especially for the fighter-bombers, and he continued his effort to obtain more groups.⁵⁵

If the weather proved unsuitable on November 5 and no improvement occurred by November 8, the ground forces would attack early on the eighth without initial support from the heavy and medium bombers. Although the Third Army staff always preferred to attack with air support, it would delay, but seldom cancel, an offensive if the air arm proved unavailable. Nevertheless, if bad weather persisted, the air leaders would still attempt to have bomber support available for later use against specific forts, well out of range of the advancing troops.⁵⁶

With the onset of static warfare during September 1944, the emphasis on reconnaissance had shifted from visual or tactical reports to photographic coverage. By the end of the month, the F-5s (P-38s) of the 31st and 34th Photo Reconnaissance Squadrons were working overtime flying daily photo cover to a depth of nine miles behind enemy lines, as well as obtaining vertical and oblique coverage of Mosel River crossing points and pinpoint photos of fortifications. In addition, the F-5s continued their program of bomb damage assessment and airfield coverage missions.⁵⁷

In October 1944 the challenge for the 10th Photo Group's F-5s increased markedly as poor flying weather created a large backlog of requests and the group lost its 34th squadron to the 363d Reconnaissance Group; this left only one squadron to handle the load. The 31st Photo Reconnaissance Squadron's historian provided a good description of the effort. "One day in October, when the weather broke, the unit flew 36 missions totaling 80 targets and 4,000 square miles of mapping." This occurred in only five hours of photo daylight. By the end of October, the overworked squadron completed 90 percent of the air-ground basic photo coverage plan, which consisted of a combination of areas and routes in a zone from the front lines to the Rhine River.⁵⁸

Before the November offensive, the reconnaissance pilots provided photos of each Metz fort as well as photo coverage of the terrain that surrounded

Air Power for Patton's Army

the city of Metz. The photographs and interpretation reports were included in the target folders that XIX TAC sent to the bomber commands for study. Patton took a personal interest in this process. When he learned, on October 31, that bomber crews had not received the required target folders, and with the unhappy consequences associated with the short bombing in Operation Cobra vividly in mind, he had intelligence officers prepare to rush them by car to Ninth Air Force and the IX Bombardment Division headquarters in Luxembourg. The XX Corps also received vertical and oblique shots of all planned crossing points, and all targets scheduled for attack by the fighter-bombers were photographed and analyzed as well.⁵⁹

With everything ready, General Weyland flew off to Mourmelon on November 4 for a farewell address to the 358th Orange Tails. Bad weather in the target area on November 5 and two subsequent days, however, forced cancellation of the strikes planned for medium and heavy bombers. Meanwhile, although the XIX TAC could only fly on the afternoon of the fifth, it made the most of its attacks on German airfields. The 354th Fighter Group racked up the day's top score with claims of 28 German aircraft destroyed and 16 damaged with no loss of its own.

The Allies, meanwhile, consolidated XII TAC and a recently equipped French First Air Force into a new tactical air force, the First Tactical Air Force (Provisional). Its commander, former Ninth Air Force deputy commander, General Royce, arrived at Nancy on November 5 to complain personally to Weyland about what he considered the lack of cooperation from XIX TAC. Apparently he expected to receive at XII TAC the 405th Fighter Group that he preferred rather than the 358th that Weyland had assigned him and he made plain to Weyland his profound displeasure. He also criticized the proposed basing arrangement for his air force. Weyland patiently explained that the initial mix-up, whereby Ninth Air Force had mistakenly assigned the 405th to Royce, had been sorted out and that Royce's command would receive new

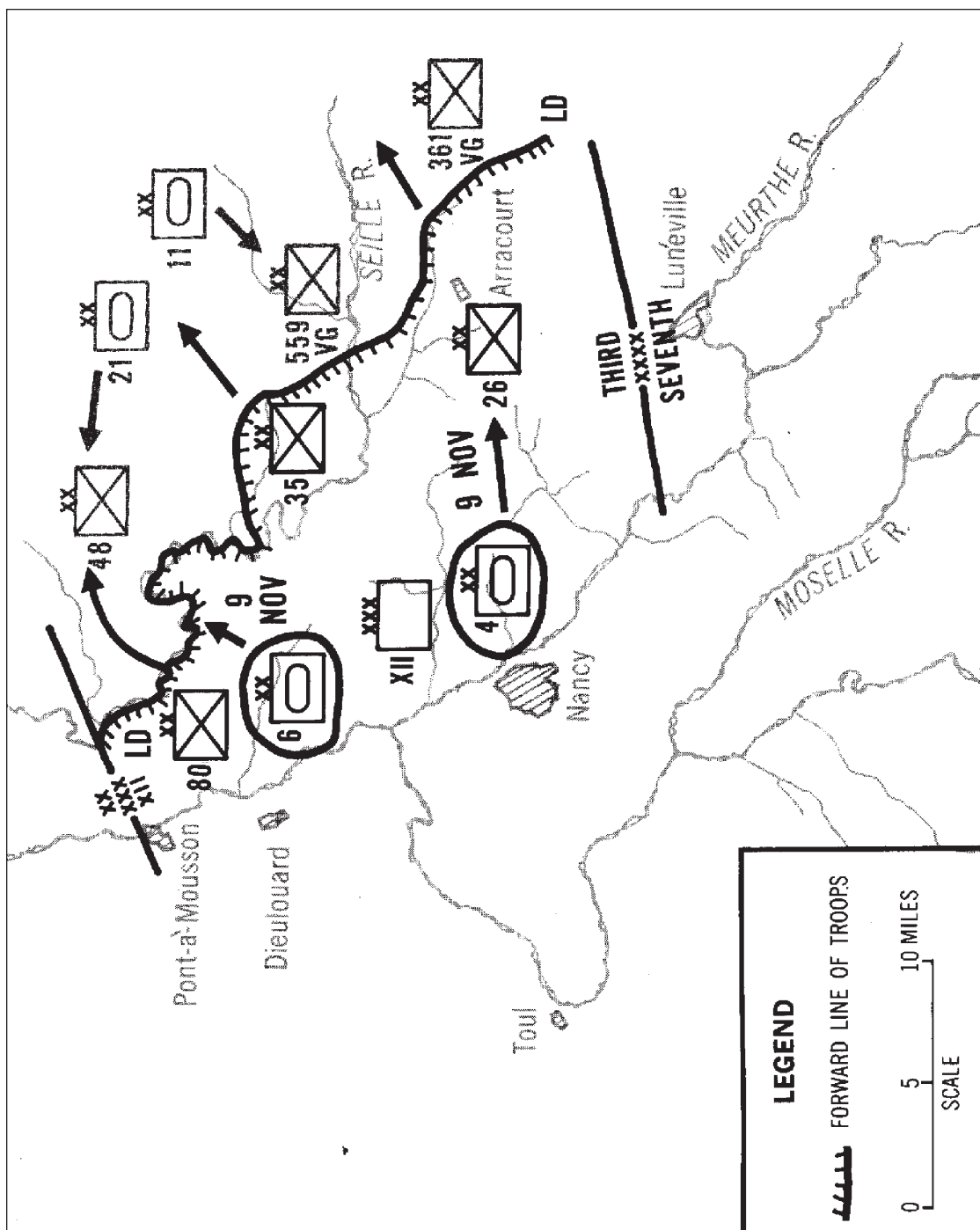


**An F-5 from the
31st Photo
Reconnaissance
Squadron.**

orders assigning the 358th Fighter Group to the XII TAC. Weyland told Royce that his command had been cooperating extensively with XII TAC in support of XV Corps. In fact, Weyland declared, “we have been doing their missions.” Nothing further occurred over the unit transfer issue, although the question of support for XII TAC resurfaced later in November and again in January, when the Germans launched a diversionary offensive in Alsace. This incident involving Royce remained one of the few instances of overt disagreement among the tactical air commanders. Such isolated cases do not detract from the cooperation that generally characterized relations among the airmen.⁶⁰

Air defense against the debilitated *Luftwaffe* became another issue of special concern to General Weyland. As the officer responsible for air defense of the Third Army area, prior to the offensive he convened a meeting to discuss coordination of antiaircraft artillery fire in the so-called inner artillery zone, the designated area within which Third Army gunners could fire freely at unidentified aircraft. Participants included the chief of Third Army’s antiartillery units and several XIX TAC officers: Col. Don Mayhew, the tactical control center commander, Colonel Ferguson, the operations officer, and representatives from the night fighter and night photo squadrons. They wanted to assure themselves that everyone concerned had detailed information on all aircraft scheduled to pass through the artillery zone and obtain agreement on the proper safeguards. All too often army gunners fired on friendly aircraft because air defense personnel had not been forewarned or because an aircraft had not conformed to flight plans. At the same time, no one wanted to waste valuable, limited night fighter sorties on intercepting what frequently turned out to be friendly aircraft, unknown to the ground controllers flying in the area. Air-ground coordination required constant attention, and the challenge to the air defense system became especially acute later during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944.⁶¹

The XII Corps opened the Madison Offensive at 6:00 a.m. on November 8, despite the lack of bomber support and the misgivings of General Eddy, who was ordered by Patton to either attack or “name his successor.” By the end of the first day, Eddy’s troops progressed two to four miles along a 27-mile front in absolutely atrocious weather and against stiff German resistance (**Map 12**). Later that morning the weather improved enough for limited fighter-bomber operations and the XIX TAC made the most of it. Enemy nerve centers attracted over half of the day’s 471 sorties. Highlighting these command post raids was an attack by the 405th Raiders that scored direct hits on the 17th SS Panzer Division headquarters at Peltre, southeast of Metz. Subsequent interrogations and investigations revealed that a number of high-ranking officers had been present when the fighter-bombers demolished the structure, and German operations suffered disruption for two weeks following the attack. The other groups also had good success on the eighth, although at day’s end XIX TAC squadrons found themselves scattered at bases all over the forward area as a result of the weather.⁶²



Map 12
XII Corps Attack: November 8, 1944

Reprinted from: Christopher R. Gabel, "The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, Sep-Dec 1944," (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), p. 26.

**Maj. Gen. Ralph Royce,
commander,
First Tactical Air Force
(Provisional)**



The cost to XIX TAC, however, proved high. The 362d Fighter Group suffered most when a German force estimated at 40 FW 190s bounced one of its 12-ship squadrons. Although the Mauler pilots shot down 11 enemy aircraft, they lost three of their own. Another of the group's aircraft crashed on a strafing run in extremely poor weather. The command had established poor-weather flying parameters at a minimum 3,000-foot ceiling with broken clouds and a visibility of three miles. For takeoff, the XIX TAC considered a 1,000-foot ceiling acceptable. Now, however, much of the target area had ceilings down to 1,500 or 1,000 feet. That evening at the command briefing, Weyland acknowledged the problem, but he asserted, given the importance of the offensive, that the command would take "calculated risks on weather" as a matter of policy.⁶³

General Weyland's expressed concerns about fighter resources and the postponement of Operation Queen, the Allied plan for First Army in the north to attack toward the Roer River defenses, convinced Generals Bradley and Vandenberg to provide Weyland with additional fighter support for Madison. On November 8, the XIX TAC received three fighter groups and the return, for one week, of its old 358th Fighter Group. In fact, despite its administrative transfer to XII TAC on the fifth and Royce's displeasure, General Weyland might well have been the beneficiary of further tactical assets after November 11 had the poor weather held. This was not to be, and when the weather improved on November 16 and Operation Queen began, additional fighter-bombers could not be spared.

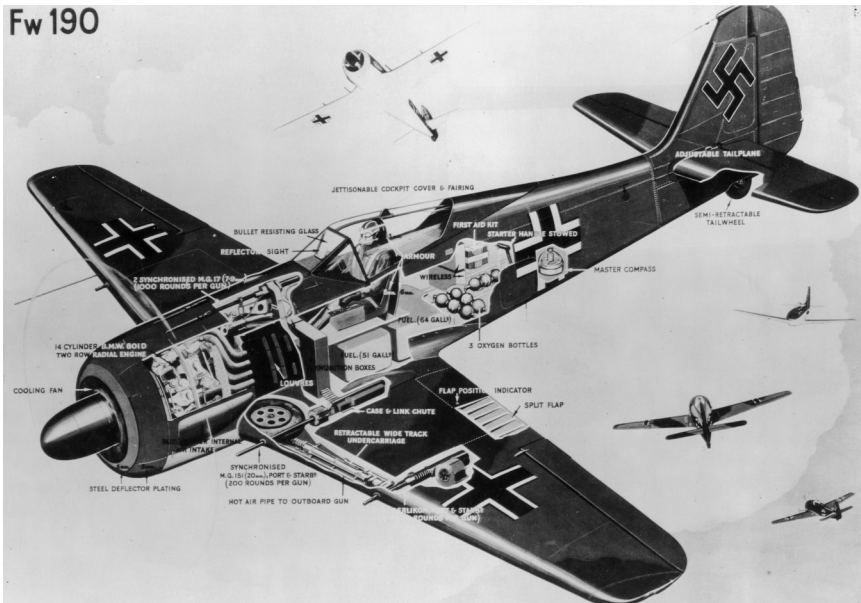
On November 7, 1944, General Vandenberg convened a conference at Luxembourg City on how to best use the medium bombers. Army and air

Air Power for Patton's Army

officials in attendance decided to strike at tank obstacles in the Siegfried Line. On November 9 large numbers of heavy and medium bombers attacked in force. To prevent the bombing of friendly troops, Third Army used radio marker beacons to identify its forward positions, and artillery lobbed two flak lines of red smoke 3,000 feet below the bombardment formation. The medium bombers had the most difficulty with the weather. Only 74 of the 514 bombers dispatched actually bombed their assigned targets, which were German troop concentrations, barracks, and tank obstacles. Of the 1,223 heavy bombers attacking, 679 used seven forts as aiming points in the 5th Infantry Division zone south of Metz, 47 attacked Thionville, 34 others hit Saarlautern, 432 bombed the Saarbruecken marshaling yard, and 31 attacked targets of opportunity. Patton considered the attack "quite a show and very encouraging to our men." He also attributed the participation of the heavy bombers on his army's front to the good relations he shared with the leading airmen. Generals Spaatz and Doolittle observed the bombing with him, and Patton told his diary that "the show was largely a present to me from them."⁶⁴

With direct dive-bombing hits, two squadrons from the 405th Fighter Group demolished this command post of the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division at Peltre, France.





A cutaway of a German FW 190.

Most of the heavy bombers had to bomb through an overcast ranging from 6/10 to 10/10 cloud cover. Evaluators considered this a major reason why the forts themselves received little material damage. In early December 1944 ordnance and engineer officers conducted a study for the AAF Evaluation Board of the air attacks during the November campaign. Relying on photographic records, personal examination of the forts attacked, and interviews with American and German ground force personnel in the assault area at the time, the survey determined the air attacks did very little material damage to the forts, but the bombing destroyed other strongpoints, disrupted communications, cut roads and railways, and generally left the enemy confused and dazed.⁶⁵

As the study of Phase III close air support operations concluded, "It was the intensity of the attack, rather than the pin-point accuracy, that achieved the results of materially aiding the attacking ground forces."⁶⁶ The lesson once again proved that ground forces had to move forward as rapidly as possible after the bombardment to take advantage of the enemy's shocked condition. The same problem recurred a few days later, in Operation Queen, when Allied ground forces withdrew to a safety zone two miles from the target area and could not move forward fast enough to prevent the German defenders from reestablishing their positions after the war's heaviest air bombardment in support of ground forces. The Cobra syndrome and fear of short-bombing continued to haunt Allied air-ground operations.⁶⁷

Air Power for Patton's Army

Operation Madison proved successful from the air force's standpoint. Assisted by the air assault, XX Corps bypassed the Metz fortifications and pushed across the Mosel River. On the second day of the offensive, XX Corps attacked north and south of Metz, after the Mosel flooded its banks and left mud ankle-deep in most places. Despite the hostile elements, the Americans established bridgeheads over the Mosel and captured eight more villages. The next day, 11 more towns fell, and Patton's troops forced the surrender of the important Fort Koenigsmacher, southeast of Thionville. For Third Army personnel, the weeks of patient training in October paid off. The tactics of bypassing the strongest fortified positions and reducing them later with high explosives and gasoline proved very effective.⁶⁸

By the third day, on November 10, 1944, the enemy began a general but "fighting" withdrawal in the region. The movement offered good targets for XIX TAC fighter-bombers, which provided effective support through November 11. In most cases Weyland's fighter groups supported a specific frontline division and with only group-sized missions. During the initial drive of Operation Madison, fighter-bomber pilots perfected what they termed village busting tactics. Standard practice soon called for successive waves of an attacking squadron in flights of four to carry three different types of ordnance: four aircraft came each armed with two 500-lb. general purpose bombs; four came with fragmentation bombs; and four came with napalm. The flights attacked targeted villages in that sequence, with the first wave opening up the houses, the second creating kindling in the structures, and the napalm dropped by the third ignited the material exposed by the bombs. As one command official dryly observed, "this [bomb] combination worked quite successfully," and ground controllers offered lavish praise. Unfortunately, the operational reports are silent on whether civilians or soldiers occupied the houses attacked, or to what extent the airmen experienced moral qualms about attacking the villages. Following the attack, bad weather set in to restrict air support on November 10 and 11, and made the following three days totally unfit for flying.⁶⁹

Mission Priorities and Aerial Resources

With Third Army's offensive off to a good start, General Weyland returned to one of his favorite concerns, the *Luftwaffe* threat to the Third Army's area. He had good reason to worry. Throughout October and November 1944, Ultra analysts continued to monitor the *Luftwaffe* buildup, which resulted in a single-engine fighter force that expanded from 1,900 to 3,300 aircraft by mid-November.⁷⁰ This represented an increase of nearly 70 percent over the numbers available in early September. Weyland attempted to enlist the aid of heavy bombers in the counterair mission. Even before the Eighth Air Force bombing on November 9, he had convinced officials to direct bombers against

16 airfields identified by his intelligence section on November 10. The result, however, proved disappointing: pilots hit only 2 of the 16 fields. Nevertheless, he repeated his request for the heavy bombers and also lobbied for the use of Eighth Air Force fighters.

The seriousness of his concern was perhaps best demonstrated on November 12, when he convinced General Patton to relieve all fighter-bombers that day from close air support missions, which permitted them to be applied against counterair targets. Weyland could never implement the consistent program of pressure on the *Luftwaffe* he desired. The weather, the limited availability of medium and heavy bombers, and the continuing high-priority rail and road interdiction program took precedence. Although it is tempting to speculate on whether a more sustained effort against the *Luftwaffe* might have crippled it for the future Ardennes assault, such a diversion of resources might well have rendered the interdiction program ineffective.⁷¹

As it was, interdiction received only 50 percent of the effort that Weyland devoted to close air support of Patton's Third Army. The statistical record for November suggests that scheduled close support sorties totaled 1,387, while the figure for armed reconnaissance was 697. The command flew armed reconnaissance missions against what officials termed targets of opportunity. On the other hand, they recorded pinpoint targets separately and the figure for this third category reached 532 sorties. Statisticians, however, reported all three in official command statistical summaries under the heading "dive bomb." Understandably, the vast majority of close air support missions in November occurred in conjunction with Operation Madison. It is also clear, in spite of Third Army's reliance on its own artillery for a significant portion of its close fire support, that fighter-bombers continued to play a major role, especially in large offensives. Once again, competing mission priorities made it difficult, if not impossible, to make interdiction the overwhelming priority on a consistent basis.⁷²

Then, too, the effectiveness of the interdiction program is enormously difficult to measure. Too often bad weather in the target area prevented accurate aircrew reporting or later assessment of bomb damage results by means of reconnaissance flights. In any case, at this stage no one could expect a fighter-bomber pilot to achieve the kind of pinpoint bombing in bad weather often unachieved by aircrews of a later generation with much improved technology. Although mission reports increasingly mention that pilots dropped bombs through the overcast under the direction of ground control, the targets normally proved to be large area concentrations beyond the bomb line. Although the MEW system could direct aircraft within range of the target, the pilot still needed to acquire it visually for accurate bombing. After December 1944, accuracy would improve markedly when the command acquired the SCR-584 and a close control device for the MEW system.⁷³

Bad weather days in mid-November compelled General Weyland to deal with a number of mission support issues. The problem of soggy airfields now

Air Power for Patton's Army

headed the list. Rainfall amounted to twice the norm during the month, and on two occasions the Mosel overflowed its banks. The 354th Fighter Group had the most difficult situation. October rainfall made its airfield at Vitry largely unserviceable and a second flood on November 8 effectively eliminated all operations from the site. As a result, the group flew from St. Dizier after November 13, until the engineers readied the field at Rosieres (A-98) later in the month (**Map 4**). The most shocking news for the Mustang group, however, came on the thirteenth, when it learned that P-47s would replace its P-51s. To say that group pilots were not pleased is an understatement of the first order. The group's historian termed November 13 a "Black Letter Day," and morale took a nosedive. Three months later, the group historian asserted that the pilots, for the most part, still preferred the P-51 because of its additional speed and better handling qualities.⁷⁴

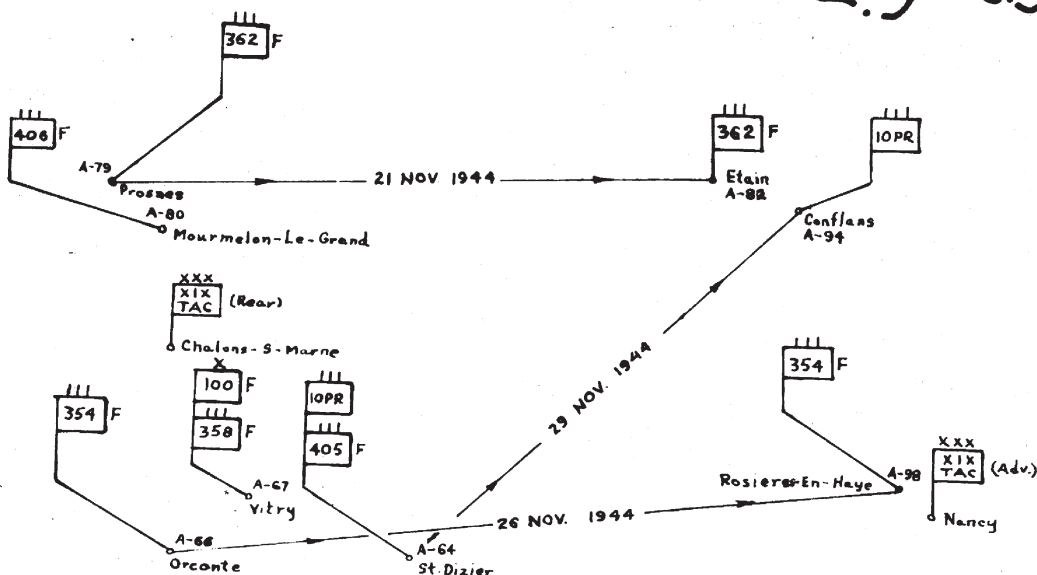
General Weyland had little choice in the fate of the 354th Fighter Group. In mid-November his job was to convert the group as soon as possible. Transition training began immediately, one squadron at a time. At Weyland's insistence, the P-47s were to arrive before all the P-51s left so at least two squadrons would remain operational at all times. Training lasted about a week and a half for each squadron, with the last squadron finishing on December 17, 1944. Although one might expect the new P-47 group to be less proficient than its sister groups, operations records do not bear this out. The 354th Fighter Group came in for its share of praise over the next two months and Weyland thoughtfully commended the group on its first outstanding P-47 group mission. Whether the XIX TAC benefited in the winter fighting by having a P-47 rather than a P-51 unit is doubtful. In any event, when the air-ground team prepared for mobile operations in March 1945 the spare parts availability for the P-51 aircraft again improved, and the 354th reconverted back to the P-51s. Even so, one officer asserted that the reconversion occurred largely because of the serious morale problem in the group.⁷⁵

The severe November rain and mud, meanwhile, forced other groups to change bases as well (**Map 13**). On November 5, the 362d Fighter Group began its move from Mourmelon to Rovres, near Etain and Verdun, where it was joined by the 425th Night Fighter Squadron. Later in the month the 10th Photo Group, with one exception, moved its squadrons and photographic facilities from St. Dizier to Conflans to escape the elements. The exception proved to be the 155th Night Photo Squadron whose A-20s could operate more safely on St. Dizier's concrete runways in bad weather. Although the command made the moves in response to the terrible weather, it now had all three groups positioned farther forward and better able to support Third Army operations. The ground advance in Operation Madison had widened the distance from the Marne bases to the front lines from 50 miles in September 1944, to as much as a 100 miles in November. Fortunately, these groups also would be well-sited to support the Ardennes counterattack in December.⁷⁶

**LOCATION AND MOVEMENTS
OF MAJOR XIX TAC UNITS
NOVEMBER 1944**

6S6S 2758
MAP SHEETS- M32 & PT3

Luxembourg



358TH FIGHTER GP RELIEVED FROM XIX TAC 5 NOV. 1944

9TH PHOTO TACTICAL GP RELIEVED FROM XIX TAC
3 NOV. 1944.

Map 13

Location and Movements of Major XIX TAC Units: November 1944

Air Power for Patton's Army

General Weyland still found the aircraft replacement situation in November unacceptable. The critical P-51 shortage could be alleviated through the conversion program, but the single squadron of P-61 Black Widows had declined to 14 aircraft from its authorized strength of 18, and prospects for replacements in the immediate future seemed poor. As a result, he proposed to Ninth Air Force that A-20 Havoc light bombers be exchanged for their P-70 night-fighter variant for intruder operations. Ninth Air Force disapproved the request. Weyland also failed to convince Ninth Air Force headquarters to support another ambitious plan. To compensate for winter conditions, he asked General Vandenberg in a November 14 letter to increase the number of aircraft authorized for fighter groups by 25. In a lengthy argument he noted that bad weather and shortened daylight hours had reduced the sortie rate to less than 50 percent of the summer figure. At the same time, the groups now received a steady flow of pilot replacements in numbers capable of sustaining a much higher loss rate. Each squadron, he said, could man 24 aircraft, or 72 per three-squadron group. Moreover, because of the low sortie rate under winter conditions, available maintenance personnel could support a 100-aircraft group, which meant that 72 aircraft could be sent on missions when weather permitted.⁷⁷

Ninth Air Force declined to raise the number of authorized aircraft, citing the eventual need for additional logistics personnel in assembly and maintenance at the base air depot as well as in the tactical and service squadrons. Headquarters Ninth Air Force had little interest in trying to change authorization for maintenance personnel, let alone aircraft, and instead it suggested reducing the flow of replacement pilots rather than increasing the number of airplanes. Although Weyland's proposal seems imaginative and reasonable for the situation in the fall, he could not foresee the strain an emergency such as

A-20 Havoc at a Ninth Air Force Base in France.



Stalemate in Lorraine

the Ardennes Offensive would put on his facilities and personnel. Indeed, late in December 1944, his command maintenance and supply officers described maintenance as poor. As a result of the heavy battle damage suffered by most aircraft in the intense effort to halt the German attack, depots and service teams became overburdened with no end in sight.⁷⁸

The nonflying days in November also provided General Weyland time to confer with XII TAC to the south on support requirements. Here the cooperative spirit and the theme of flexibility predominated. He agreed to a request from General Saville that the XIX TAC assist XII TAC with two groups to support Seventh Army's planned offensive on November 15–17, with the proviso that XIX TAC receive help from Ninth Air Force to the same extent. When Ninth Air Force authorities in Luxembourg did not approve this arrangement, Weyland declined to send his two groups, but he still promised Saville help if he got "in a jam." Unexplainably, when Ninth Air Force subsequently agreed to provide Saville's command four groups instead of two, XII TAC declined them because it "expected bad weather on the 14th."⁷⁹

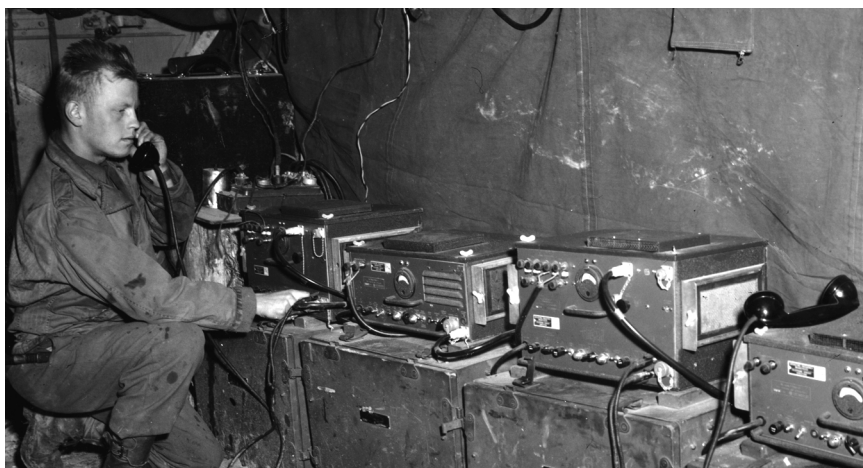
Autumn weather in Lorraine was awful. One member of the 362d Fighter Group described the move to Rouvres on November 5 in terms reminiscent of the First World War:

When the last remnants of the Group splashed up the quagmire roads into this churned up sea of mud that was to be our new site and possibly our winter home, the unanimous opinion was expressed that web-feet and fins would be requisitioned next....Living conditions in the immediate future looked very dismal and bogged down.⁸⁰

The slow pace of the campaign and the many days when the weather prohibited flying led to inactivity and boredom that could be relieved only slightly by contact with the dour Lorrainers. Typical was the attitude of the 405th Fighter Group historian who concluded his commentary on his outfit's experiences in November by noting that "all in all, it was an unremarkable month, characterized only by its dreariness and monotony."⁸¹

The weather finally improved somewhat on November 15, 1944, and the command sent a squadron each from the 405th, 406th, and 362d Fighter Groups to support XII and XX Corps as well as fly armed reconnaissance. General Eisenhower visited the command that day and, like many before him, dutifully paid tribute to the outstanding partnership of XIX TAC and Third Army, and to General Weyland personally. Also on this day the 358th Fighter Group departed officially for XII TAC, which left the command with four fighter groups, its lowest number since it became operational.⁸²

Fair weather—a ceiling of 5,000–7,000 feet and visibility between two and three miles—made November 17 the biggest day in the air in a number of

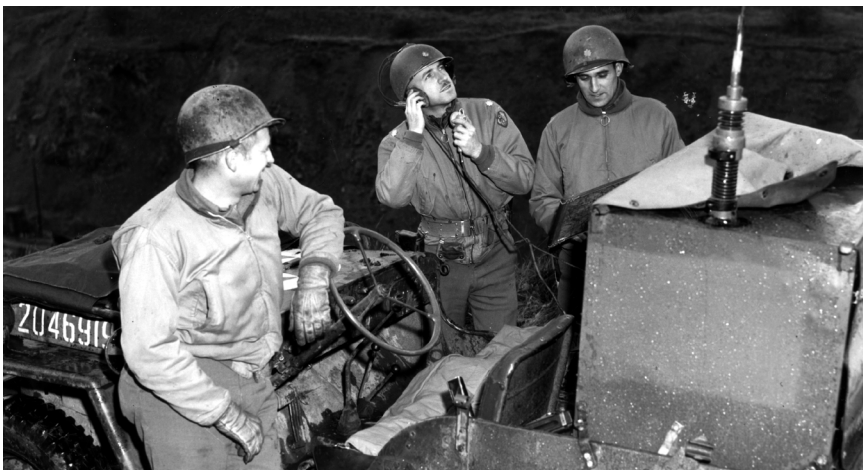


As the Ninth Air Force–Third Army operations advanced, air-ground teamwork became more sophisticated. Air and ground coordinators shared VHF radio facilities in relay stations near the front (top) and were also installed in mobile radio stations in 3/4-ton trucks (bottom), receiving messages from communications officers (top, opposite page).





Air-ground operations and liaison officers directed fighter-bombers directly overhead to targets from information relayed to them (center).



Effectiveness of counterflak artillery also increased through air-ground teamwork, using liaison planes for spotting flak positions and directing fire to officers in ground units (right).



Air Power for Patton's Army

weeks. Weyland sent all groups on two missions, totaling 317 sorties. Two groups furnished Third Army close air support, with the 406th Fighter Group flying in support of the 10th Armored Division in its push beyond Fort Koenigsmacher and the 405th Fighter Group supporting the 6th Armored Division in the XII Corps zone. Weyland tried to visit Third Army's corps and division headquarters as often as time permitted. On November 17, he happened to be visiting the 6th Armored Division, where he conferred with an appreciative General Eddy. Weyland also encountered his disputant, General Wood, commander of the 4th Armored Division, soon to be relieved after the stress of combat proved too severe. Their earlier disagreement over control of a XIX TAC officer seemed behind them, and indeed, Weyland had little trouble in Lorraine with the corps and armored division commanders who understood the constraints imposed by the weather, and invariably appreciated XIX TAC aerial assistance when the weather made flying possible. Even most infantry division commanders, whose troops generally received less air support than their armored division counterparts, expressed satisfaction with XIX TAC's effort on their behalf.⁸³

On November 18, General Weyland visited XX Corps, which had nearly completed its encirclement of Metz with the able support of the 406th Fighter Group. With the 405th Fighter Group assigned expressly in close support of XII Corps units, only the 354th and 362d Fighter Groups could attack interdiction targets. The 354th and 362d had a field day. Tactical reconnaissance had reported heavy rail traffic west of the Rhine, and the two groups combined to destroy nearly 500 railroad cars, the highest number of claims in the command's history. According to reports, they also counted destroyed nearly 300 motor vehicles, 26 armored vehicles, 74 locomotives, 42 horse-drawn vehicles, 32 gun positions, and 19 buildings.⁸⁴

November 19, 1944, proved to be another good day, but a costly one. As Third Army cut the exits from Metz, fighter-bombers swooped down to within a hundred yards in front of the American patrols to strafe the retreating enemy. The command lost 13 aircraft and 8 pilots, and officers now considered Third Army's zone of operations the worst for flak concentrations since Caen back in the early stages of the Normandy fighting. The command lost 62 aircraft shot down in November, exactly twice the October figure. Ironically, despite the higher losses, the XIX TAC took important steps to reduce the flak menace. For one, the command's intelligence section maintained a detailed flak "library" and display map showing all known flak concentrations. The daily intelligence report also described each new flak sighting to pilots.⁸⁵

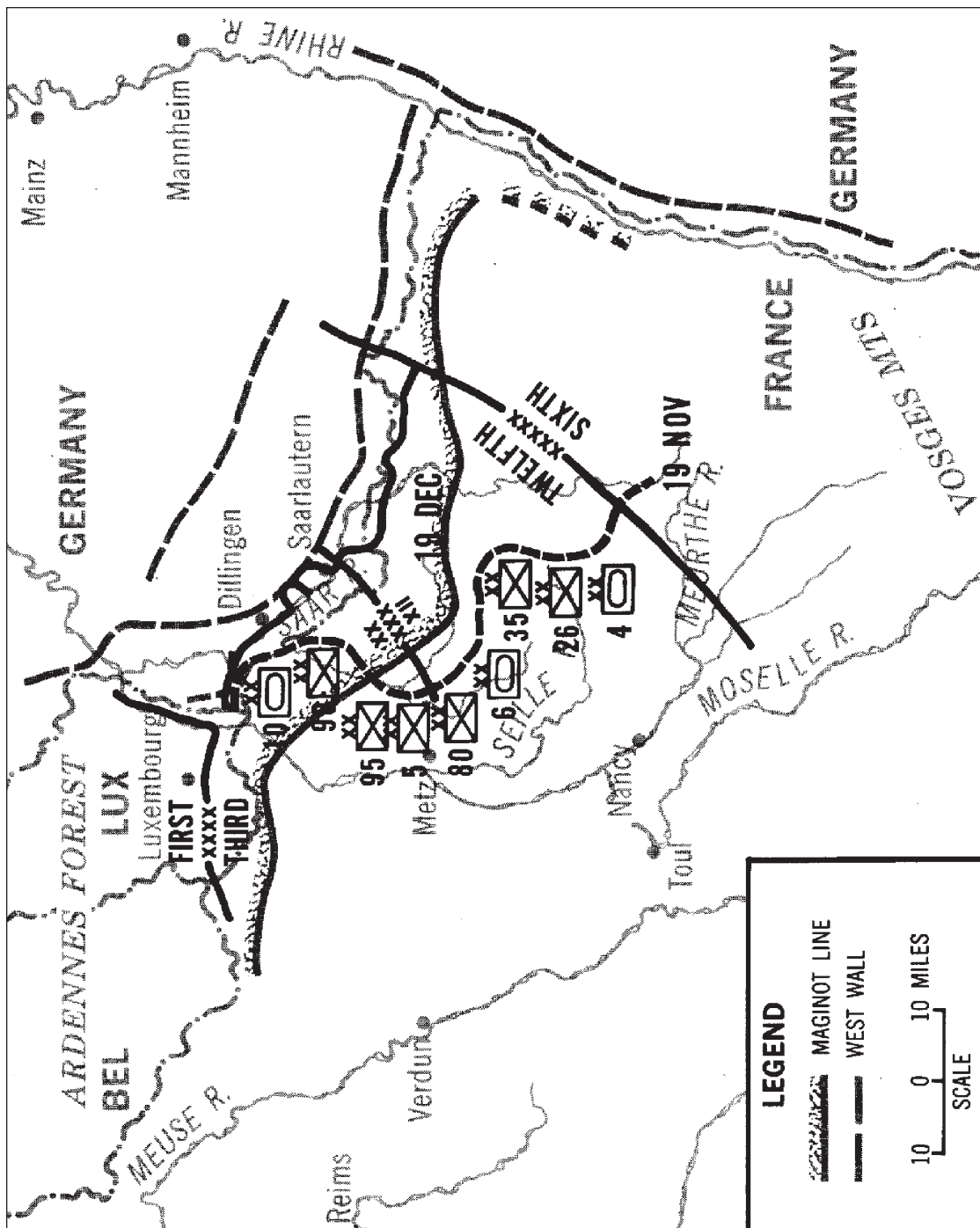
The major development, however, proved to be the anti-flak program initiated by the ground-pounders of XII Corps. As General Weyland explained at a press conference in December 1944, "this was not at our request, but that started in the XII Corps—I did not even think of it, but somebody in the XII Corps saw that when bombers came over, the [XII Corps] artillery would open

on the flak positions. Undoubtedly, this saved many planes and lives.” Indeed, the Army directed antiaircraft artillery to fire on all known enemy gun positions when fighter-bombers operated in their area. The new procedure called for the artillery to be alerted when aircraft assigned to close air support missions in the area were airborne, then a liaison plane served as artillery spotter and directed fire on the German flak positions. In one of the XIX TAC combat reports, an official judged the XII Corps artillery support very effective and “most popular with the pilots.”⁸⁶

The effectiveness of counterflak artillery fire increased as the result of a major advance in air-ground teamwork that occurred during the latter part of the Metz operation, when Third Army corps and divisions adopted the “combined operations office” used at the command. Now, air and ground officers shared the same room and received facilities and equipment previously unavailable. Technicians furnished VHF air-ground equipment for the new offices, which provided good integration of the air effort into the ground operation. Ground personnel, for their part, ran a land line to the artillery fire direction center, which made target marking and, especially, antiaircraft fire considerably more effective. Even with improved air-ground cooperation, however, the massive concentration of light flak on the Siegfried Line and the increase in close support missions in November produced a high fighter-bomber casualty figure for the month.⁸⁷

After November 19 the weather closed in again for five straight days, as Third Army forces led by the 95th Infantry Division (a unit comprised of those Patton liked to call “the Iron Men of Metz”) completed mop-up action inside the ancient city on November 22. Third Army officers proudly boasted that they commanded the first military force to capture Metz since 451 AD. Some might criticize the length of the operation and remind Americans that the Prussians had occupied Metz during the Franco-Prussian War, but Third Army’s two-month siege remains impressive in view of the region’s worst flooding in 20 years and limited air support. Critics, including German officers, have been less kind to Patton for following his own broad-front strategy of dividing his armor and using it as infantry support rather than forming it into a concentrated battering ram to break through the Maginot and Siegfried Line defenses in early November. As it was, after Metz fell, six forts still remained in German hands and General Patton made the decision to invest them while continuing eastward. By the end of November, his forces had crossed the Saar at Saarlautern and Dillingen against stiff resistance to hold a continuous front of 25 miles inside Germany, while only four of the Metz forts remained in enemy hands (**Map 14**).⁸⁸

The high Third Army casualty rate of 22,773 attested to the grim fighting in Lorraine, 90 percent of which came from infantry units. Losses in infantry units became so severe that draftees from noncombat positions had to be involuntarily retrained as infantry. The cold and soggy November fighting



Map 14

Third Army Operations: November 19–December 19, 1944

Reprinted from: Christopher R. Gabel, "The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, Sep-Dec 1944," (Ft. Leavenworth, Kan.: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1985), p. 29.

also produced a trenchfoot problem of monstrous proportions. Fully 4,587 cases appeared at division clearing stations, and an estimated 95 percent of the individuals afflicted proved useless to the Army until the following spring.⁸⁹

For General Weyland's forces, it became the same old story of limited flying. After Metz fell, the command had only two more good flying days in November. On November 25, XIX TAC pilots flew 220 sorties divided generally between the two groups supporting advancing ground units and two flying armed reconnaissance/interdiction in the Rhine and Saar valleys. The next day only the 406th Fighter Group flew ground support missions, but its targets included 14 towns that subsequently fell to XX Corps' assault. In a perceptive comment on air-ground effectiveness on November 21 General Patton observed, "The impetus of an air attack [for ground forces] is lacking due to [the] fatigue of [the] men. I have attempted to get at least an infantry division out of action for a rest." The brutal conditions of fighting in Lorraine seemed to hamper the air-ground team at every turn.⁹⁰

While weather prohibited flying the last four days of the month, Weyland turned his attention to the problem of the Siegfried Line defenses. The XX Corps found, to its unpleasant surprise, that cities like Saarlautern had actually become part of the West Wall. American forces discovered the Siegfried Line to be unlike the Metz or Maginot Line systems of huge underground forts and artillery positions. Third Army now confronted a line of Dragon's Teeth—tank obstacles, extensive barbed wire, well-positioned pill-boxes with overlapping zones of fire, and fortifications that included cities such as Saarlautern and Dillingen. Even though the German forces opposite Third Army were reduced to one-quarter the size of the American attacking force, the tenacious defenders remained in well-prepared positions and fought hard to protect their homeland. Fighter-bombers could only offer modest assistance against such fortified defenses.⁹¹

The key problem was how to get Third Army forces across the swollen Saar River in the face of the entrenched Siegfried Line defenders. Given Third Army's situation, General Weyland again decided to coordinate heavy air bombardment with the advance of the infantry units. Planners termed this plan "Hi-Sug." An earlier attempt to breach defenses at Merzig through an aerial assault on November 19 failed overwhelmingly. There, XIX TAC employed an air plan that called for eight groups of medium bombers to soften up the bridgehead area. Only four groups completed their bombing runs, however, and although accuracy proved good, the 9th Bombardment Division lost 13 aircraft and eight pilots. Once again, for fear of short bombing, the ground troops had been positioned so far back from the Saar River that they failed to attack the German defenses until 48 hours *after* the bombing. Weyland judged the air effort as "absolutely wasted."⁹²

The lesson repeated in the Merzig bombing proved a telling one in the Northwest European campaign. When medium or heavy bombers carpet-

Air Power for Patton's Army

bombed a defensive area, the ground forces needed to move forward immediately after the last bomb had fallen and close with the stunned defenders. For the Hi-Sug plan, Third Army decided to cross the Saar River near Saarlautern at the end of November, with forces directed to move forward to within 2,000 yards of the river prior to the air bombardment. The bombers would carpet-bomb the eastern side of the river in the proposed bridgehead area.⁹³

General Weyland served as the major liaison figure for air support in the joint planning process. On November 27 he requested of Ninth Air Force heavy as well as medium bomber strikes. Although he did not get the heavy bombers for the assault, Ninth Air Force promised full use of the medium bombers. During Third Army's morning briefing on November 29, General Patton approved Weyland's plan to have medium bombers strike the Siegfried Line. As always, air-ground coordination and timing would be critical. Weyland assured the ground leaders that medium bombers could be employed as soon as Third Army ground forces were ready, and Patton's staff responded by saying XX Corps was prepared for the assault any time from November 29 to December 2. Patton wanted to attack the following day, but later on November 29 his staff notified Weyland that XX Corps would not be ready for the bombardment until December 1. Although this meant that targets in the northern area of the offensive had to be scratched, the plan still looked promising (**Map 14**).⁹⁴

On November 30, the air-ground team held a joint planning meeting at Third Army headquarters where it reviewed the plan to use medium bombers and further examined and established last-minute timing changes in detail. The XX Corps would lead off, with the 95th Infantry Division's Iron Men attacking across the Saar River in the vicinity of Saarlautern, while the 90th Infantry Division performed a holding action. In the XII Corps zone, the main effort would be made by the 26th Infantry and the 4th Armored Divisions, with the 80th Infantry Division to follow. If XX Corps encountered trouble on its front, it would hold the enemy's key forces while XII Corps troops broke through the gap below Saarlautern in the enemy's weakened sectors.

The air plan called for medium bombers employed over three days, with the first day's bombing of Siegfried Line defenses to be accomplished visually before 2:00 p.m. Should bad weather occur on the second and third days, Third Army agreed to continued bombing using the Oboe radar blind-bombing method. That evening, at the XIX TAC briefing, General Weyland explained that the entire 9th Bombardment Division force would be allocated to the Siegfried Line breakthrough operation now scheduled for the following day, December 1. He also told his staff that Third Army, reflecting confidence in the bombers as well as the urgency of the operation, had overcome its doubts and now agreed to accept Oboe bombing at any time.

General Patton's willingness to permit use of a blind-bombing system, which was more effective against large area targets, suggests how important

Stalemate in Lorraine

aerial bombardment support had become for the Army commander. Even so, his troops would attack without air support if necessary. Before that evening's XIX TAC briefing, Patton met with Generals Gaffey, Gay, and Weyland on the subject of the air plan. Although he desired air support, Patton declared that the 90th and 95th Infantry Divisions would attack on December 3, with or without the benefit of aerial bombing.⁹⁵

General Weyland remained confident that Operation Hi-Sug, his third joint operation of the Lorraine Campaign, could overcome the stiff German defenses, the bad weather, and the friction of war to burst open the Siegfried Line and permit Third Army to move rapidly on to the Rhine River. If so, he could put behind him a frustrating period for his command.

Assault on the Siegfried Line

The air-ground assault in Lorraine in early December 1944, was the only major Allied offensive on the western front at that time. First and Ninth Armies in the north continued to clear the Huertgen Forest after many weeks of grim infantry fighting and high casualties and labored to build up their forces along the Roer River for a major offensive in mid-December. The river would remain a major barrier until American troops could wrest control of the dams on its upper reaches from the Germans. In Alsace, Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers's 6th Army Group achieved greater success, forcing retreating Germans from French soil and reaching the Rhine River. Only a large bridgehead of enemy forces west of the Rhine near Colmar, the Colmar pocket, remained to impede the Allied drive.⁹⁶

General Patton's high expectations for Operation Hi-Sug rested in large part on the massive bombing assault scheduled for December 1, and he, General Weyland, and their respective staffs devoted considerable effort to ensure that air-ground coordination proved successful. At midmorning on December 1, 1944, Weyland called the Third Army commander to tell him that eight groups of medium bombers were on their way. The XX Corps had been notified as well. Shortly thereafter, General Patton called back requesting that XX Corps receive priority from the fighter-bombers, too, and Weyland informed him that this had already been done. Indeed, XX Corps units began crossing the swollen Saar River supported by three of four bomb groups that flew 96 of the 123 total sorties for the day.⁹⁷

By midafternoon the early optimism began to fade. Because of radio failure, Weyland learned that only four of the eight bomb groups had bombed their targets. The air commander then conferred with General Patton and Colonel Harkins, his deputy chief of staff, who informed him that, in any case, XX Corps had not been in position that morning to follow-up the bombing and establish its bridgehead on the east bank of the Saar. Despite the laborious planning of the past days, ineffective air-ground coordination once again prevented success.

Air Power for Patton's Army

General Weyland agreed to try again the next day and Patton promised to get the necessary target information and current front line locations from XX Corps by 7:30 p.m. that evening. Weyland then contacted Ninth Air Force to again request the bombers and to assure bomber pilots that the target information would be delivered at about 8:00 p.m. Director of operations at the Ninth, Col. George F. McGuire, responded favorably but suggested that, because 12th Army Group established flying objectives for the medium bomber effort, it would help if Third Army contacted General Bradley's headquarters. Weyland, determined to avoid repeating the first day's mistake, never hesitated to call on General Patton for crucial assistance, and he considered assistance crucial in this instance. He asked the Army commander to "needle" higher headquarters to ensure the support of Ninth Air Force and Patton said he would call Bradley immediately. As these machinations on December 2 illustrate, the medium bomber force also had other competing priorities and represented a limited resource.⁹⁸

At that night's XIX TAC briefing, the airmen announced that 10 groups of medium bombers, approximately 360 airplanes, would strike the Siegfried Line the following day, while the fighter-bomber force would be strengthened by the loan of two groups from IX TAC and XXIX TAC. They assigned to the fighters armed reconnaissance missions and other missions to disarm strong-points and blunt counterattacks in support of the ground advance.⁹⁹

During the Hi-Sug attack on December 2, 1944, the TAC commander and his combat operations officer (using call signs Ding Bat 1 and Ding Bat 2) observed the medium bombing from a P-47 and P-51, respectively. This time all medium bomber groups struck the targets assigned and General Weyland found only one group that appeared to have bombed off-target. This time XX Corps troops had moved to within 2,000 yards of the Saar River and followed up the bombing effectively, despite heavy resistance. The 95th Infantry Division's crossing on December 2 received air support only from the 406th Group, although the group did good work against what the army considered the highest concentration of enemy flak it had ever faced. However, the 406th Fighter Group achieved its bombing claims at a high cost: five aircraft lost to flak. Using napalm and fragmentation bombs, the 406th fighter-bombers struck artillery positions under the close control of the air liaison officer who maintained contact with the division artillery officer. The latter directed effective artillery smoke to mark targets in the Siegfried Line and the pilots claimed five gun positions destroyed. It represented another example of a successful air-ground cooperative effort that turned on placing the combat operations office at division level.¹⁰⁰

Despite the close support from medium bombers and fighter-bombers, the 95th Infantry Division came under intense enemy artillery fire from the Siegfried Line fortifications for the next few days as its forces struggled to cross the overflowing Saar River. In the face of severe winds, the veteran 405th Fighter Group failed repeatedly to lay smoke bombs on the hilltops and

Stalemate in Lorraine

enemy observation posts to screen the crossing. General Weyland followed the events closely and held out hope that the army would make the grade. The tenuous bridgehead did hold, but the XX Corps became bogged down in house-to-house fighting in Saarlautern that would last for two weeks. Meanwhile, XII Corps pushed steadily, if slowly, northeast toward the Saar, while at the same time mopping up enemy activity in Saar-Union.¹⁰¹

While close air support of the advancing infantry units accelerated on December 2, XIX TAC also decided to support Third Army's drive with a renewed interdiction program against rail targets on December 2. The air-ground team did not doubt the need for a major effort. Weyland remained convinced that he could cover the ground troops sufficiently and also engage in interdiction operations to isolate the battlefield. Tactical reconnaissance pilots reported heavy rail traffic west of the Rhine since late October. Third Army intelligence specialists, meanwhile, began to monitor and analyze rail traffic in their area in mid-November. Observations and reports of rail traffic for the period November 17 to December 2 showed, among many sightings, 300 trains active on November 17, 84 on November 18 and 19, and 46 on November 26. This rail traffic, intelligence officers concluded by December 2, suggested "a definite buildup of enemy troops and supplies directly opposite the north flank of Third U.S. Army and the southern flank of First U.S. Army." Subsequent analysis of rail traffic on December 9, 14, and 17, cited a continuing, heavy volume of traffic directed toward the Eifel region, a hilly, densely wooded region of Germany north of the Mosel River between Trier and Coblenz. In early December, Third Army intelligence officers began to warn of a possible German spoiling offensive in their sector or from the Eifel.¹⁰²

The XIX TAC interdiction program in early December, however, could hardly do more than minor damage to the enemy. Even though it received priority attention, mission reports from December 1–16 show the command flew interdiction and close air support missions in equal proportion. As the November program demonstrated, the competing priorities of the command made concentration of aerial forces on any single mission next to impossible. The ferocity of the fighting in the Siegfried Line called for flying ground support missions on every day possible.¹⁰³ While the interdiction and close support missions assisted the slow-moving offensive, it became clear that Operation Hi-Sug had not achieved the overwhelming breakthrough sought by the air-ground team and the military stalemate on the Siegfried Line continued. Weyland immediately began working on plans for a more elaborate operation, a massive air assault that would require even closer coordination between XIX TAC and Third Army forces.

On December 5, 1944, Weyland attended an important conference at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) in Paris. Allied conferees addressed the question of how best to use air power against the Siegfried Line. Particular interest centered on the potential effectiveness using strategic bombers in a tactical role, a proposition long considered doctrinal

Air Power for Patton's Army

heresy by strategic airmen. Predictably, attendees representing strategic bombers opposed using heavy bombers for anything except strategic bombing. First and Ninth Army representatives wanted to divert heavy bombers for use against dams on the Roer River. Weyland argued that if the heavy bombers were made available, they would be effective in a tactical role, in coordination with a major offensive in which the ground forces would be moving forward. Evidently his argument helped, because Eisenhower requested that General Spaatz, commander of United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe (USSTAF), assist Third Army with the support of heavy bombers even though Allied leaders continued to view Patton's front as secondary. At the same time, it was clear Third Army would have to make substantial progress against the Siegfried Line or go over on the defensive. The Ninth Air Force commander, General Vandenberg, concurred and when Spaatz said he would visit Nancy, Weyland assured him that XIX TAC already "had a plan to use the heavy bomber effort."¹⁰⁴

The next day, December 6, General Spaatz and General Doolittle, commander of Eighth Air Force, arrived at XIX TAC headquarters to confer with General Weyland and his staff. Weyland explained the Third Army's situation on the Siegfried Line and the air plan to get them through it, while Colonel Hallett discussed the targeting objectives for the heavy bombers. Spaatz and Doolittle accepted the plan in principle, after which they met with General Patton and together approved Weyland's joint plan of attack. Unlike previous heavy bomber operations, this plan called for attacks on the Siegfried Line in the vicinity of Zweibruecken by the heavy and medium bombers for three consecutive days. Troops from XII Corps would move forward while bombing of deeper targets continued. Five target areas would be hit initially by heavy bombers and safety would be assured by detailed coordination with antiaircraft artillery units, the use of marker panels, and by Eighth Air Force radio communications. Fighter-bombers would be employed to keep the enemy off balance and break up any counterattacks.¹⁰⁵

General Weyland considered his plan the best solution to date for solving the dilemma of the time lag between the carpet-bombing and infantry advance. Previously, Operation Queen, and initially Operation Hi-Sug, failed because the infantry took too long to reach the target area after the bombing. Clearly coordination, timing, and a host of other potential problems had to be clarified for Weyland's plan to succeed. For example, the planners needed to coordinate operations with Seventh Army and XII TAC, and Doolittle and Spaatz agreed to visit General Devers, the 6th Army Group commander, and General Royce, his air commander. Both accepted the XIX TAC plan "in principle." Meanwhile, General Weyland set to work on other requirements such as developing target folders with current photos of the targets and coordinating air defense measures. The latter became an issue because of the proposed move to the Metz airfield of the command's 100th Fighter Wing in the near future. Weyland always favored keeping the same army antiaircraft units to

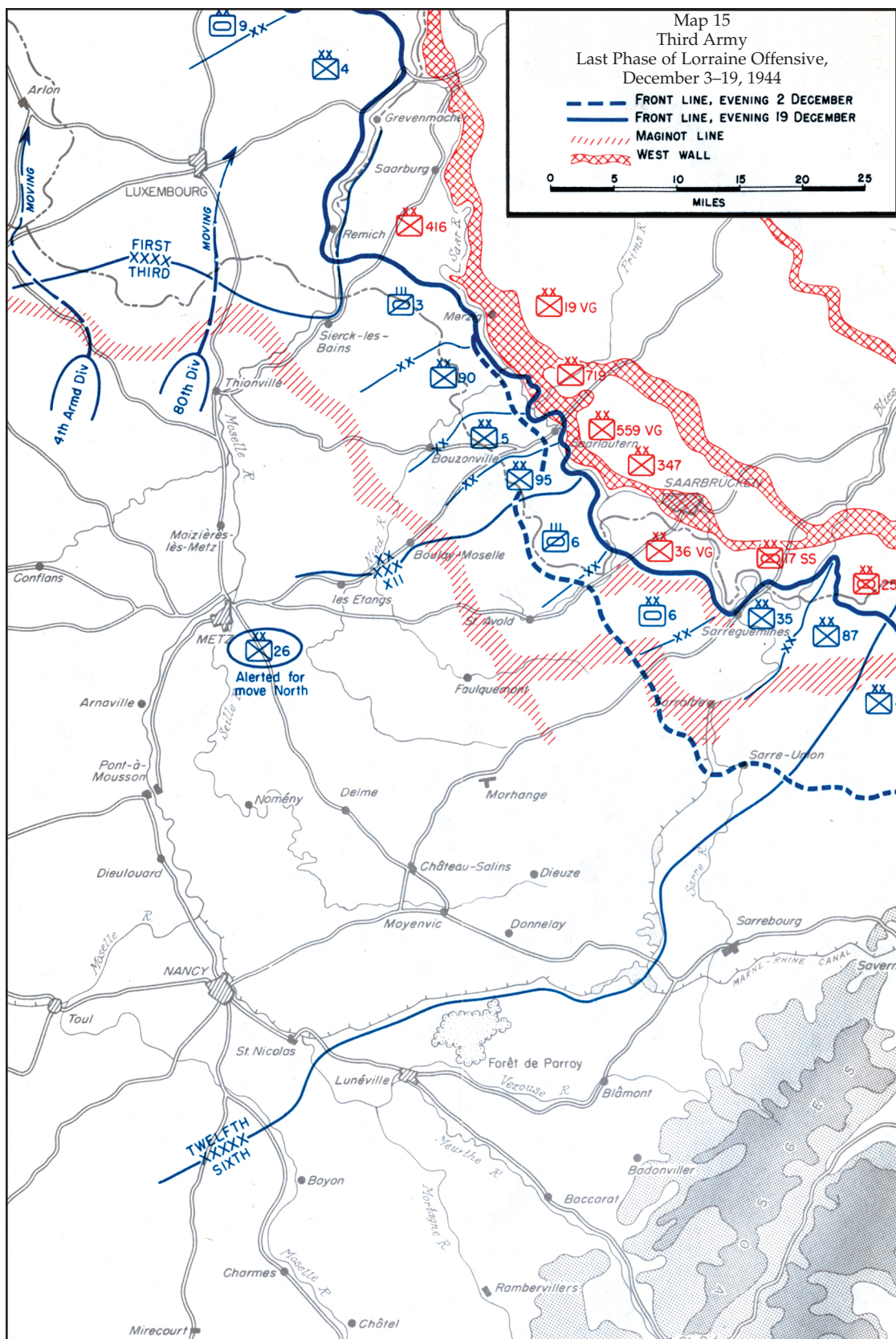
Stalemate in Lorraine

defend the same air units when they moved to a new airfield. For the upcoming offensive, he sought to ensure that air defense units would be provided adequate communications for control of the inner artillery zone or, failing that, that these zones would be curtailed for the offensive. He met with key air defense officers from 12th Army Group and Third Army on December 8 and they promised to have their ground antiaircraft controllers well-briefed.¹⁰⁶

Meanwhile, the Hi-Sug ground offensive continued. At Metz, Fort Driant fell to XX Corps troops on December 7. Now only Fort Jeanne d'Arc remained in enemy hands. General Walker's troops also continued to enlarge their bridgeheads at Saarlautern and Pachtern. In the XII Corps sector, troops engaged in house-to-house fighting in the southern part of Saargumaines and corps artillery shelled Saarbruecken (**Map 15**). The XII Corps received priority air support at this time and Weyland's command continued its general practice of assigning one group to cover one particular front line army division. On December 8, for example, the 405th Fighter Group supported the 35th Infantry Division's attempt to consolidate its four Saar River crossings near Saargumaines, attacking towns and marking artillery targets with smoke, while the 362d Fighter Group repelled counterattacks threatening the 80th Infantry Division. Both groups received letters of appreciation from XII Corps for their

Generals Spaatz, Patton, Doolittle, Vandenberg, and Weyland (left to right) at the advance headquarters in Nancy, December 1944.





SOURCE: H.M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, Map 49, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1950)

Stalemate in Lorraine

aerial assistance, but progress proved slow in the face of German delaying actions which included land mines, booby traps, persistent counterattacks, and the ever-present mud and rain.¹⁰⁷

Bad weather set in again on December 9, 1944, and XIX TAC severely curtailed air operations for the next three days. Even so, with the 90th Infantry Division in trouble, the command responded despite the poor weather. On the ninth, for example, it flew only 56 sorties, including a 362d Fighter Group mission to drop blood plasma in wing tanks to troops of the 90th pinned down in their Saar River bridgehead. Invariably, during December two fighter-bomber groups flew close air support missions for the same corps: the 362d supported XII Corps operations while the 406th provided coverage of XX Corps units. Meanwhile, the 405th Fighter Group, which had flown more ground support missions than any other group during the Lorraine Campaign, now assumed the burden of flying armed reconnaissance missions. The Raiders had no trouble adjusting to this role.¹⁰⁸

Not surprisingly, General Weyland concentrated on the forthcoming combined operation during the lull in the air war. Perhaps a measure of his personal association with the joint operation is expressed in the name adopted for it: Tink, his wife's nickname. It was a busy time for the planners. On December 10, Seventh Army and XII TAC officials visited Third Army, where all acknowledged that the forthcoming XIX TAC–Third Army offensive would have first priority. Another coordinated attack, termed Operation Dagger, would follow in the Seventh Army area within four days of the start of Operation Tink. They further agreed that Generals Saville and Weyland would go to SHAEF to receive final approval for their plans, while General Patton would meet with his Seventh Army counterpart, General Patch, on December 13 to decide final timing of the attacking forces. After the December 10 meeting, Patton described the expectations of the Allied planners. Previous tactical carpet-bombings, which had been confined to a single day, had not proved entirely effective. Allied leaders believed that the three day air blitz on Zweibruecken planned in Operation Tink would catch the enemy off guard.¹⁰⁹

On December 11, officers from Strategic Air Forces Headquarters in England arrived to discuss Operation Tink, after which Weyland called Spaatz to request RAF Bomber Command's support as well. General Spaatz promised to attend the meeting at Third Army headquarters scheduled for the thirteenth. On December 12, the XIX TAC's chief of staff flew to London with the air plan, issued only that day, to coordinate the Eighth Air Force bomber contribution. "D-Day" was set for December 19.

Improved weather on December 12 also brought a request from Patton and General Walker, XX Corps commander, for special support for his troops closing in on the final Metz fort. Bombing of the fort by six groups of medium bombers was originally scheduled, but it had to be scrubbed because of bad weather. Weyland promised an extra effort from his forces to take up the slack,



Dicing, or low-level, photo taken across the Saar River at the Siegfried Line (top) by a 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group F-5 provided vital information needed for Patton's troops in breaching the formidable defenses (bottom).



Stalemate in Lorraine

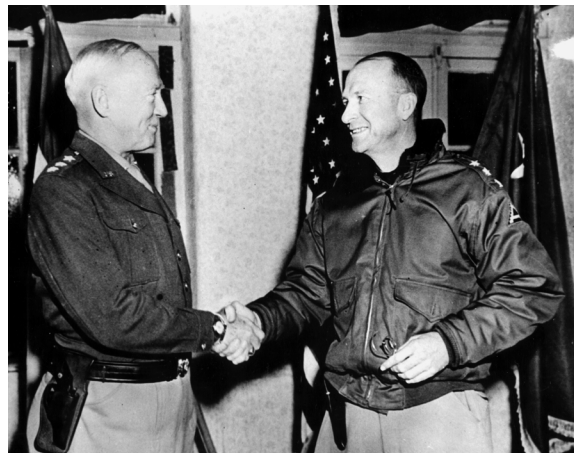
and the 406th Fighter Group responded with five missions on the twelfth. Fort Jeanne d'Arc finally surrendered that day.¹¹⁰

The next few days were filled with various planning meetings for Operation Tink. Generals Patton and Patch together with Generals Vandenberg, Weyland, Saville, and a number of other key figures met on December 13 to examine air-ground plans and procedures in detail. Although Tink remained first priority, Seventh Army would attempt to sneak through the German defenses in the Vosges under Tink's momentum, assisted by Ninth Air Force's medium bombers (**Map 9**). All air support for XII TAC and Seventh Army would be coordinated though XIX TAC, thereby ensuring that centralized control of the air forces would be maintained.

With the plan in good order, General Weyland spent December 14 and 15 visiting his units. On the sixteenth, he arrived back at Nancy, where he convened a meeting for representatives from all participating air organizations to confirm reconnaissance areas and towns selected for interdiction attacks. In the evening of December 16, General Weyland, in what appears to have been little more than an afterthought, penciled a brief notation in his diary about events reported to the north of Third Army, "German offensive started in First Army area." One can only speculate whether at this early point he appreciated the significance of the assault and what it might mean for Operation Tink. The weather was good on December 16 and aircrews happily described a "field day" flying against German targets west of the Rhine, reports reminiscent of those in the heady days of August in France.¹¹¹

At the Third Army morning briefing on December 17, 1944, army briefers reported that First Army and VIII Corps were "very surprised" at the German counterattack in their zone. Not only had the *Wehrmacht* caught them off guard, the enemy marshaled a larger striking force than anyone had expected. General Weyland promised to send two fighter groups north to support

Generals Patton
and Patch



Air Power for Patton's Army



A squadron commander in the 354th Fighter Group checks last-minute details with his flight leaders before a mission against German supply lines.

VIII Corps throughout the day. In fact, December 17, with a total of 356 sorties, turned out to be the busiest flying day for the command since November 8, when Operation Madison began. All four groups flew in support of the beleaguered VIII Corps troops in the Ardennes region near Bastogne.¹¹²

The XIX TAC issued the revised air plan for Operation Tink on December 17. It confirmed that this attack would be the largest tactical air operation of its kind yet attempted. Medium bombers from the IX Bombardment Division and heavy bombers from Eighth Air Force and RAF Bomber Command would bomb both specified areas and 34 individual targets during three consecutive days. Moreover, Eighth Air Force fighters would fly 14 armed reconnaissance routes and bomb 26 supply depots. Fighter-bombers from XIX TAC would attack all communications centers behind the point of assault immediately following the main bombardments. In the confusion, the ground forces expected to be able to move forward with less opposition. Tink, indeed, was an ambitious plan.¹¹³

Bad weather on December 18 restricted flying to two groups, the 354th on loan to IX TAC and the 362d in support of XII Corps. General Weyland now confided to his diary that "First Army is in a flap" over the German counterattack and that his Siegfried Line assault, Operation Tink, had been postponed from December 19 to 22. After the briefing next morning, on December 19, a special meeting took place at Third Army headquarters. General Patton's staff announced that the 4th Armored and 26th Infantry Divisions had been ordered to move north, if required, to relieve VIII Corps. In that event, Weyland concluded, Operation Tink would be canceled because Third Army would have insufficient forces to exploit an air bombardment. Patton was to

Stalemate in Lorraine

meet that day with Eisenhower and Bradley at Verdun and would subsequently advise Weyland of the final decision.¹¹⁴

That afternoon General Weyland called General Vandenberg. He urged the Ninth Air Force commander to continue with Operation Tink and hoped that it would be unnecessary to divert ground forces. Yet, early the same evening Patton called to say that “Tink was scrubbed.” Official notice from SHAEF arrived later, and with the severity of the situation in the Ardennes becoming clear to all, Weyland immediately requested three additional fighter groups and a second reconnaissance group to help Third Army pull the “First Army’s chestnuts out of the fire.”¹¹⁵

Although Operation Tink never occurred, it offered perhaps the best coordinated air proposal for propelling ground forces through German Siegfried Line defenses in the Lorraine Campaign. It also provided a good means of assessing General Weyland’s role as its key planner and liaison officer for air support. Operation Tink could have represented “what might have been” for Generals Weyland and Patton. On December 20, however, the air commander had little time to brood about cancellation of his plan. The Ardennes emergency required everyone’s full attention.

Lorraine in Retrospect

The Lorraine Campaign ended in mid-December 1944. General Patton captured the sentiments of those he led for Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson in one of his own colorful epigrams:

I hope in the final settlement of the war you insist that the Germans retain Lorraine, because I can imagine no greater burden than to be the owner of this nasty country where it rains every day and where the whole wealth of the people consists in assorted manure piles.¹¹⁶

General Weyland certainly was no less frustrated by the three months of static warfare. The high hopes of September 1944 had unquestionably turned sour and the unpleasant weather seemed to match the progress of the campaign. Nothing that Weyland could command in the air seemed able to alter that stalemate. In terms of the weather, the terrain, the forces, and the fortifications, the Lorraine Campaign in many ways represents a case study in the limitations rather than the capabilities of air power.

All the while, in response to requests from Generals Patton and Vandenberg, Weyland assigned and shuffled mission priorities to meet the most crucial needs as he perceived them. With air supremacy seldom contested by the *Luftwaffe*, he directed most of the command’s flying toward inter-

Air Power for Patton's Army

diction and ground-support targets. For air power purists, he may have favored close air support missions too often at the expense of interdiction. Nevertheless, Weyland always responded first to the needs of Patton's troops in combat. Normally he handled this responsibility with two fighter groups, which left the other groups free to apply against the remaining missions. Most of these consisted of armed reconnaissance sorties, but bomber escort, leaflet dropping, fighter sweeps, and at times, air alert required attention. Force size continued to be a constant headache. To be sure, commanders seldom, if ever, believe they have sufficient forces. Yet, given the competing responsibilities, and with the exception of supporting the infantry and armor units, Weyland's command was far too small to concentrate on any assignment in force. In Lorraine, the command had sufficient resources to cover the ground support mission only because Third Army itself had to fight with reduced forces and suffered from the tyranny of logistics.

Most of all, with the size of his command, Weyland found it impossible to defeat the weather, which became the air-ground team's worst enemy. A liability for the Allies, the abundant bad weather was always a comfort to the enemy. On bad-weather days, the fighter-bombers did not fly effectively; sometimes they did not fly at all. This left the German defenders free to move supplies to the forward area and dig in from Metz to the Siegfried Line, ably protected by heavy flak concentrations. Even in the best of times, with more air firepower, the dug-in and reinforced strongpoints often proved impervious to fighter-bomber attack. Weyland knew this, and so did the enemy. Little could be done until both air and ground forces received reinforcements, and their mission in Lorraine became more urgent. This was the promise of Operation Tink and the reality of the Ardennes emergency.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, tactical air operations made gains during the campaign. Air-ground cooperation improved considerably as a result of counter-flak procedures and the combined operations offices situated at Army corps and division headquarters. The air arm also demonstrated that it could be effective in aiding the advance of the ground forces in spite of unfavorable conditions. Numerous letters of appreciation from the ground units attest to aircrew success in attacking German strongpoints, repelling counterattacks, and creating better tactical mobility for the troops.

Radar and communications developments during the three months accounted for much of the gains. Like so many aspects of the command, air-base movement became routine, in spite of the weather, while tactical air power proved itself able to react immediately and adjust to new situations. Such adjustments, for example, might involve the rapid movement of an entire group from one base to another, or involve reconnaissance aircraft leading fighter-bombers to an immediate target and coordinating army anti-flak artillery fire.

Early in the campaign Weyland recognized that larger air attacks were required to break the stalemate on the ground. For him the answer lay in long-

Stalemate in Lorraine

range, jointly planned offensives propelled by a heavier concentration of air power. If the four air-ground operations he helped develop—Operation Madison, Merzig, Hi-Sug, and Tink—proved less than completely successful, they nevertheless were well-conceived. In December, he became absolutely convinced he had found the answer to the stalemate and a return to mobile warfare in Operation Tink. Although it was a complex plan, requiring closer coordination among the various air and ground participants than any previous offensive, Weyland remained confident that thorough preparation, teamwork, and close cooperation would ensure success.

Above all, through all the frustrating experiences of the Lorraine Campaign, Weyland and Patton maintained close cooperation between the air and ground forces. Although other Allied air-ground teams cooperated effectively in the fall campaign, XIX TAC and Third Army developed a special relationship under adverse conditions. The official Army historian of the campaign declared, “one outstanding feature of the Lorraine Campaign was the cooperation between the XIX TAC and the Third Army.”¹¹⁸

Near the end of the Lorraine experience, General Patton met the press with his air commander. He explained the Third Army’s “method of air-ground tactical cooperation” for the correspondents assembled so that they might describe it accurately for the public back home:

No operation in this army is contemplated without General Weyland and his staff being present at the initial decisions. We don’t say that we are going to do this and what can you do about it. We say that we would like to make such an operation—now how can that be done from the air standpoint?¹¹⁹

Third Army staff members, General Weyland added, understood “not only the capabilities...of air but also [its] limitations....Third Army does not look upon the XIX Tactical Command as a cure-all.” He then turned to the heart of their relationship. “Our success is built on mutual respect and comradeship between the air and ground [team] that actually does exist. You can talk to any of my boys about that....My boys like the way the Third Army fights. My kids feel that *this is their army* [emphasis added].”¹²⁰ The mutual respect, even affection, that promoted this kind of cooperation, coupled with Weyland’s pragmatic approach to using tactical air power, surely accounted for much of the air-ground team’s success.

The cooperation between the XIX TAC and Third Army air-ground team had grown and prospered, remarkably under the most disconcerting conditions of static warfare in Lorraine. That cooperation would be put to the test under far more desperate circumstances in mid-December 1944—in the Ardennes.

